

THE
LIFE AND EXPLOITS
OF THE
SCARLET PIMPERNEL

(SIR PERCY BLAKENEY, BART.)

by

JOHN BLAKENEY - *Author*

John Montagu Orszag, Baroness Orczy

with a foreword by THE BARONESS ORCZY



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FOREWORD

BY THE BARONESS ORCZY

MY DEAR JOHN BLAKENEY,

It is with great interest that I have read your book which, as you tell me, purports to be a biography of Sir Percy Blakeney—known as the Scarlet Pimpernel.

You do not tell me if you claim to be an actual descendant of the famous Sir Percy, but you certainly seem to have collected a great deal of information, not only about him, but also about his ancestors: you clearly trace his descent from the first Sir Percy to the English Blakes and from them to the Scarlet Pimpernel, the subject of this memoir. As far as I can judge, your deductions are pretty accurate.

My own searchings after Sir Percy and his doings end with the French Revolution, the period of his most romantic exploits: the subsequent transformation of his yacht, the *Daydream*, into a privateer corvette, his acquaintance with Lord Nelson and his seafaring adventures during the Napoleonic wars come as news to me, but I can quite well understand that with his adventurous disposition, he found the enforced calm after the end of the Terror irksome and turned his attention and unflagging energy into a new channel. His destroying the two temporarily abandoned French frigates, single-handed, by a stratagem which seems almost miraculous but which is quite feasible, is perfectly consistent with his character and methods.

▼

I feel a certain degree of regret that I did not follow Sir Percy's career after the end of the Terror, but I abandoned him and the story of his doings after the end of the French Revolution, thinking that the fall of Robespierre and the establishment of the Consulate was the natural conclusion of his activities.

I certainly feel a sense of gratitude to you for your persevering research into the antecedents of Sir Percy Blakeney, and also into his subsequent adventures, for you have certainly succeeded in filling up many gaps in the life history of that most remarkable man. Of course, I cannot vouch for the authenticity or accuracy of your information anent these adventures, but they seem to me to be quite consistent with the many fragments of his life-history already known to me.

In any case, please accept my best thanks for this most interesting biography of my favourite hero of romance.

Yours v. sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Emma Kate Tracy". The signature is written in dark ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

MONTE CARLO.

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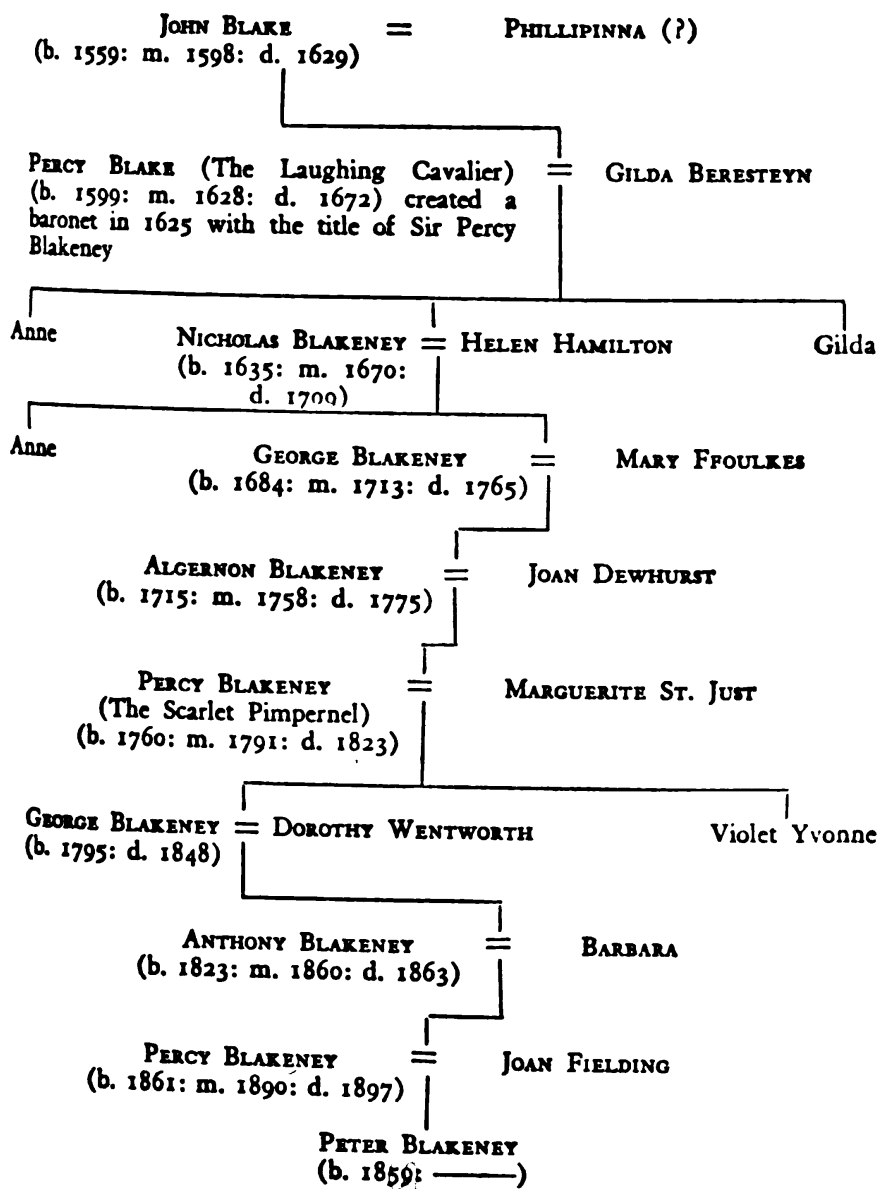
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INTRODUCTION

1559—1760

CHAPTER ONE

THE LAUGHING CAVALIER

I

THE first pages of this man's book of life, whose name is chronicled in history in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, are almost blank. Whence he came, who was his sire, only he and a poor artist knew, and they kept their secret for over thirty years. There is his portrait in the Wallace Collection in London, but from it nothing can be guessed. Records are scant and documents not always reliable. Gaps can only be bridged over by stray reminiscences, a promissory note yellow with age, a faded doublet in an old chest, a rusty sword hanging over a mirror. But in Haarlem, where he undoubtedly lived, the Grootemarkt had heard his spurs clanking on the cobbles, the Dam Straat had listened to his mighty laugh, the waters of the Spaarne had shuddered at his furious oaths and the Fishmarkt had echoed to the clash of his sword.

The burghers of Haarlem spoke of him under the nickname of Diogenes, there being a blessing and a warm welcome for the nameless adventurer wherever he should happen to be. And the name was a fitting one; for Diogenes, when some adventure had filled his purse, would dispense philosophy and wine with equal largesse. Unfortunately, those happy occasions were rare. The open air was his usual bedroom and the hedgerows his dining-table. During those early years the only certainty

is his friendship with Frans Hals: his only settled occupation we know anything about is that of artist's model. Between two mad escapades or when in hiding from revengeful pursuit, Diogenes found food and shelter in the artist's attic until it was safe enough for him to venture forth again in quest of money or adventure.

That this man—Diogenes, the Laughing Cavalier, call him what you will—was a vagabond no one could deny; that he sold his sword to the highest bidder, everybody could condone; that he drank and swore and swaggered and discoursed, no one cared; that he was a very gallant gentleman, everybody must affirm. But wherever the steps of Destiny led this soldier of fortune, whether it was into a dungeon or a beggar's hovel, or into a palace or the council chamber of kings, a laugh reverberates at his passing.

2

From the picture by Frans Hals, his features are familiar to the world. Change the hat for a powdered wig: replace the doublet with a satin coat and the ruff for a filmy neck-tie; then raze the arrogant moustache and you have the portrait of the Scarlet Pimpernel, every feature faithfully reproduced and, on comparison with the painting by Gainsborough of Sir Percy Blakeney, the two men might be twin brothers. The ancestry is patent to all eyes. Both were men of exceptional personality, possessing exceptional characteristics which their friends pronounced sublime and their detractors arrogant, possessing qualities which called forth the devotion of friends and the rancour of enemies. There is no doubt but that the Laughing Cavalier—Diogenes—possessed the same sunny disposition, the same careless insouciance, the same infectious laughter and adventurous spirit

which is to be observed, transmitted to his descendents, in the personality of the Scarlet Pimpernel himself.

These are proofs enough for those who admire and love Sir Percy Blakeney. The romantic events of the lives of the two men seem to be too parallel to admit of mere coincidence; the personalities are too akin not to be based on heredity. But for the biographer, the gap of nearly two hundred years must be accounted for, and when the search for evidence began, the connecting links were piled one on the top of the other, turning doubt into certitude. The Dutch vagabond was seen to be the great-great-grandfather of the English gentleman in direct line from father to son without break or bar sinister. Nor is there the slightest inconsistency in the known chronicles of the family fortunes to make one pause or consider whether the facts and documents are specious enough to be believed.

Clotho had drawn the thread of this man's life from the same distaff as that of John Blake of Blakeney, in the county of Sussex, Diogenes' father, and this is the thread which joins the vagabond who swaggered and fought in Holland in 1625 to the dandy who adventured in France in 1792.

CHAPTER TWO

BLAKE OF BLAKENEY

I

IN England, the religious revolution had become an accomplished fact. The rebellion of the earls had failed—Norfolk and Howard had been beheaded. A new social system had been happily secured. The virgin Elizabeth—against whom the Pope had hurled his Bull of illegitimacy—was proclaimed Queen. The new times—that of Marlowe and Shakespeare, of Bacon and Drake—had raised England to a golden age; an age of mystery, of art and horrible brutality, of fervent piety and abnormal lust. Spain was humbled to the dust and Rome crushed to powder. And over all towered that flamboyant, grotesque, marvellous woman, Elizabeth.

To have lived during those exciting years must have been a great privilege. Fame and fortune were easily wooed and won by any man with sufficient contempt of life and enough impudence to carve out his own fortune. Noble birth could not fail to attract recognition in high places, a cunning brain did not lack opportunities of furthering intrigue; a handsome face had no need to beg for fair favours. It is therefore strange and somewhat anomalous to find a man endowed with all these attributes and yet practically unknown to history, a man who cared neither for the pomp and glitter of court, nor for the favouritism of the Queen; a man who sought neither honour nor glory either in adventure or in war; a man

who did not use his good looks and fine physique in order to promote some influential love affair or aristocratic alliance, and yet who prospered according to his own lights, who lived contentedly in his manner, who did not bother about politics or foreign diplomacy, who was happy with the little his industry and learning had procured for him.

Such a one was John Blake, of the village of Blakeney, in the county of Sussex, close to the Kentish border.

Born in the year of grace, 1559, of humble and honest parents, young John passed his childhood in comparative security from the religious troubles which were fomenting the drama of the Armada. He lived with his parents in the depths of the Kentish country, his home a cottage on Primrose Hill, near Boxley Wood. Here, on the Kentish downlands, boyhood fled through the years in terms of the seasons. At the age of ten he knew the rotation of crops, the intricacies of cattle breeding and the arts of the dairy. Little else had been inculcated into his eager mind. Of education, a smattering of English grammar, the use of a quill and the capacity to count up to ten were his only accomplishments, taught to him by a father who was totally ignorant of book learning. What more was needed for a farmer's lad?

But John Blake was infused with an overmastering ambition. Often, of a summer's evening, had he climbed Primrose Hill and gazed out over Chatham and the sea. His eyes had seen Dutch frigates at anchor in the mouth of the Medway; his ears had heard the clattering of the coach horses as they pulled up and down the hill. Those sights and sounds brought longing to his soul and eventually inspired him with a dream—a dream to be realised.

A merchant adventurer! He had listened to stories of

strange and rare stones brought by the "sea-dogs" from mysterious far-off lands. So, when his fifteenth birthday had dawned, he climbed to the top of Boxley Heath, but scrambled resolutely down on the other side, and from that hour the sea claimed him.

From 1574 to 1580, John Blake journeyed on the seven seas. During those years he visited nearly every country in the world, drifting from port to port. He started as clerk to a ship's chandler, rose to be an agent for a timber merchant, but finally abandoned this steady, though modest employment in order to pursue his ambition into the remote places of India. All the time that he was plying the quill in the stuffy cabins or bargaining for wood in the warehouses, he was busily planning his future career.

The study of gems fascinated him to the exclusion of all else, and he spent all his spare time in this pursuit until he deemed that he had imbibed sufficient knowledge to start out on his own quest for fortune. After many adventures, after frequent vicissitudes of good fortune and ill luck, he acquired the requisite acumen necessary to avoid bad bargains. He contrived to assemble a goodly collection of gems with which he laid the foundations of his wealth. He had learnt to distinguish fake from real at a touch, to estimate a price at a glance. This consummate knowledge brought him renown amongst dealers and jewellers.

Soon he gave up travel and settled in London; his reputation opened for him the doors of trade relationships. But he refused all offers of partnerships and always insisted on playing a lone hand. Anon, he was presented with a charter by the Queen, becoming thereby, by special appointment, jeweller to Her Majesty. In 1589

there is an entry in the royal account book which reads: "To-day received in audience John Blake, Esquire, who presented us with a diamond. He was suitably rewarded."

From the temporal standpoint, therefore, John Blake appeared to the eyes of the world as a man who had gained for himself his heart's desires: his boyhood ambitions were realised: fame and fortune were his. Nevertheless, in spite of those outward insignia of happiness, there was a mystery which his neighbours seemed incapable of piercing. As far as we know no word of it ever passed his lips even when in his cups. Sly hints or open speech were of no avail against his silence on the subject of his secret. His mouth would shut tight and his face would become grim and hard. But all noticed that no woman ever graced his house.

2

The reason for this apparent dislike of the fair sex had its origin in a journey undertaken during the spring of 1598.

A rumour had percolated through the trade that a ruby of unusual size and colour had been discovered and was to be found somewhere in Europe. Naturally, John Blake was the first to be consulted on the subject and by unanimous consent of the Goldsmiths' Company, he was elected chairman of a group of merchants entrusted with the mission to purchase the stone and bring it to England.

He sailed from Chatham with a well-filled purse and the good will of the entire fellowship; he safely reached Amsterdam, which city he proposed to make his headquarters. The search took him into many countries and

cities. The bankers of Holland granted him credit and guilders. Whilst waiting for news, John Blake visited Haarlem.

It was during this visit that he contracted an ill-advised marriage with a Dutch girl, Phillipina, of unknown origin. In fact, it appears that he was forced to the altar. It seems strange that this clever and far-seeing man of business should have embarked on a youthful liaison and so conducted the intrigue that he was actually trapped into making a wife of a mistress. Nevertheless, the marriage ceremony was duly performed and is recorded in the archives of the city. Frans Hals had all the papers relating thereto; and the entry in the register of St. Peter's Church can be no forgery.

But John Blake, though an unwilling bridegroom, was not to be tied by a service in a church. Matrimony lay lightly on his shoulders and he wore it as if it were a cloak to be cast off as soon as its use was no longer needed. Within the year, the famous ruby had been found and bought by him; he shook the dust of Haarlem from off his feet, deserting the young girl-wife of a few months, soon to become a mother, without compunction, without a thought for her welfare and that of his unborn child.

On returning to England, the profit made on the sale of the ruby was such that retirement from active business was now well within his reach. Without denying himself of any of the pleasures of life, he retained his trade relationships with Amsterdam and London, and was thus able to add considerably to his income, already swollen in the past years to healthy proportions. In other words, from the general practitioner, he became the consultant, the expert whose advice was sought and whose opinion

soon became law, whilst he drew a goodly percentage for the services so rendered.

Thus, in the year 1600, he had prospered exceedingly. He was the possessor of a stately country mansion in the village of Blakeney, in Sussex; his freehold of over a thousand acres was rich in pasture and timber; he had banking accounts in every capital of Europe and the Queen had received him at Court. Fortune had indeed smiled on this rough farmer turned jeweller and country squire, and every project or transaction which he touched turned to gold. Life had treated him kindly and age did not seem to impair his magnificent physique. But there remained always an unpleasant taste in his mouth at the recollection of the Dutch wife.

3

Since Dutch Protestantism looked upon sexual sin as the cardinal crime, and since few were ready to believe the story of her marriage to John Blake—at any rate, those who had known her as his mistress and who were not impressed, therefore, by her talk of marriages lines—Phillipina, after Blake's desertion of her, was exposed to obliquity and insult. From this life of shame and misery she was rescued by Frans Hals, who, a true friend, gave her shelter in his house and his protection for what it was worth. It was whilst living under his roof that she gave birth to John Blake's son, who was christened Percy.

There seems to be no record extant of those early years. We know that the artist cared for the boy and gave him what learning was necessary, providing him with clothes and paying the required fees. Of Phillipina next to nothing is known. Diogenes was wont to call his

mother a saint; beyond this one phrase, he hardly ever spoke of her. Where she died, and when, is wrapped in the silence of time.

Thus is Destiny accomplished . . . thus the story told of a hero's birth . . . thus is the life of a vagabond linked through a poor little anonymous Dutch girl to that of the English dandy, Sir Percy Blakeney, the Scarlet Pimpernel.

But in the year 1625, Lachesis was spinning the thread of life of the nameless adventurer, working into the woof the warp of coming events. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

COAT OF ARMS

I

THERE comes a time in all biographies when dull facts must be recorded to appreciate to the full the life and works of the principal figure. A legendary hero may act upon the world's stage isolated from the rest of the chorus or the minor rôles. He is permitted to pirouette and prance in a *pas seul*, and people do not require rhyme or reason for his dance. But an historic personage needs a background of ancestry from which his hereditary characteristics, both virtues and vices, may be accurately deduced; for the man or woman cannot escape from environment and upbringing, nor be separated from them. A man's actions are too complex, his thoughts too tangled to be analysed simply. He cannot be detached from the foundation rock of family; he cannot be impaled on the point of a pin like a winkle and relished without seasoning. The necessary details must be touched upon—those details which describe the real man, however briefly.

The exploits which gained for the unacknowledged son of John Blake the hand of Gilda Beresteyn, the beautiful daughter of the richest burgher in Haarlem and the honours which the Stadholder showered upon his broad shoulders, have been handed down from father to son in the families of two countries. The daughters of the Blakeney of Sussex are still married in the lace veil worn

by Gilda Beresteyn on her wedding day; the sons of the Blakens of Haarlem show pridefully the sword Bucephalus with the petals of blood-rust upon its blade. Diogenes emerges against his will from the obscurity of his vagabondage and, in a few months, appears in the lime-light of the historical stage. And his cue was the face of a beautiful maiden who whispered a few frightened words into his ear on New Year's Eve, 1625.

So much of the history is now legendary that it has been difficult to disentangle truth from fiction. History, however, provides the evidence which goes to prove that Diogenes, on New Year's Eve, 1625, fell in with a group of hooligans and rescued a Spanish girl from death at their hands. His two companions, vagabonds like himself, were wounded during the affray and Diogenes carried them into the precincts of St. Peter's Church in order to render them first aid. There it was that he encountered Gilda Beresteyn for the first time.

That much of the story is quite clear. The remainder of the tale is to be found in a little brochure written, some fifty years later, by Hans Beresteyn, a cousin of this same Gilda. Unfortunately the author, in his endeavour to sing the praises of Percy Blake—Diogenes—whom he seems to have greatly admired, has slurred over the true facts, and in certain chapters he is undoubtedly guilty of deliberate romancing. Nevertheless, even allowing for considerable bias, a fairly accurate outline of the story may be gleaned from Hans' book, so long as the reader is careful to discount—at any rate, in part—the eulogistic phrases concerning Diogenes and to reject certain quotations of conversation for which the author must have drawn upon his imagination.

"Lord Stoutenberg," he writes, "that arch villain, was

nursing his hatred against the Stadholder. On New Year's Eve, 1625, he, together with Nikolaes Beresteyn and five others, was plotting to murder Maurice of Nassau. Fearful of some eavesdropper overhearing their nefarious plans, those abominable traitors had chosen the chancel of the church for their council chamber. And Gilda, who had entered the church to pray to the Almighty, unhappily overheard the treachery through the lips of her own dearly beloved brother.

"She was discovered. Horrified at the dastardly plot, she threatened to reveal it to her father; whereupon Stoutenberg demanded of Nikolaes the removal of Gilda to a place of safety where she could be kept a prisoner until such time as the deed was accomplished, lest she put her threat into execution. Nikolaes, unwilling personally to put this outrage upon his sister, searched the town for a man who would be unscrupulous enough to do it for a consideration. Everybody in Haarlem knew that Diogenes, the vagabond, was always ready for adventure, and that he suffered from a chronic lack of money. To him did Nikolaes unfold his story and succeeded in bribing him to abduct Gilda."

According to Hans Beresteyn, Diogenes accepted the bribe and consented to carry out this shameful plan because he deemed that the girl would be safer in his hands than in those of a pack of assassins and conspirators headed by her own brother.

He carried out the instructions given him by Nikolaes Beresteyn. These were that he should convey Gilda, by a roundabout route, to Rotterdam, and there place her under the care of one Ben Isaye, with whom Nikolaes and his family often had business dealings. It seems that once there, the girl did attempt to win Diogenes over to

her side and revealed to him the truth surrounding her abduction. Thus he learnt for the first time of the conspiracy to murder the Stadholder.

Percy Blake was now in a quandary. The adventure which had begun as a light-hearted affair, had turned into an undertaking of a grave and dangerous nature. He felt that he must try to warn the Stadholder of the peril which threatened him and, at the same time, keep watch over Gilda in order to protect her from the machinations of Stoutenberg.

With this double object in view, he hastened to Delft, where the Stadholder was staying, and was thus able, that same night, to warn Maurice of Nassau of the plot against his life. On his return to Rotterdam early the next morning, he found that Stoutenberg, no doubt aware that Gilda was likely to betray her knowledge of the conspiracy, had taken steps to keep her in durance under his own eye and, to Percy Blake's dismay, he saw Gilda being borne off in a sleigh, whither he knew not, surrounded by Stoutenberg's men.

To make matters worse, whilst endeavouring to keep Gilda in sight, he himself was set upon by a band of ruffians and overpowered. He was taken across country to a deserted Molen where the conspirators had their headquarters, and here he was kept a helpless prisoner. He had apparently failed in his second undertaking. He certainly had succeeded in warning the Stadholder, but he was now powerless to help Gilda, who was trapped in the snares of the plotters; both she and he were at Stoutenberg's mercy.

"Gilda," Hans Beresteyn tells us, "proud and disdainful, still smarting under the humiliation of her abduction at the hands of the vagabond, believed the plausible stories which both her brother and Stoutenberg now told

her. She believed that Diogenes had abducted her solely for the sake of the ransom which her father would be willing to pay—she believed that Stoutenberg had renounced his plan of murdering Maurice of Nassau and had, in fact, freed her from the hands of an unscrupulous and venal adventurer.”

And here the author’s admiration for Diogenes becomes very marked, for he declares that Diogenes actually confessed to the truth of these calumnies, because his one wish was to spare Gilda the pain of learning the full extent of her brother’s turpitude. He denied nothing and calmly awaited death at the hands of his tormentors.

“Indeed,” says Hans Beresteyn, “the brave man was on the point of suffering a shameful death when rumour spread like wild fire among Stoutenberg’s followers that the plot had been discovered and that the Stadholder was advancing upon the Molen with a large body of troops. During the *sauve qui peut* which ensued, Diogenes succeeded in getting Gilda out of Stoutenberg’s hands and forcing Nikolaes to confess to his father the ignoble part that he had played in the plot against his own sister.”

That same evening, Percy Blake was betrothed to Gilda.

2

Cornelius Beresteyn was forced to admit that the vagabond was indeed a fine fellow! Ungrudgingly, the father agreed that Diogenes had earned the right to marry his daughter. But he was very anxious lest Diogenes’ lack of patronymic should cause future unpleasantness for the young couple and affect their position in Haarlem. Now that the happy-go-lucky days were presumably over, now that Diogenes was assuming civic responsibilities by taking Gilda for wife, Cornelius in-

sisted, not unkindly, that his future son-in-law should try and tell him something of his parentage.

Diogenes frankly told him all he knew; his father's name, the secret marriage, the cruel desertion of the young wife and child. Tactful questions had elicited these and other facts about the sad story. The older man felt that the time had come to forget rancour and to heal the breach between father and son. Not that Cornelius was a man of that stamp who would refuse his daughter happiness just because her lover was nameless; but he felt that irresponsibility had been carried too far and that the jest had been overdone.

But neither persuasion nor threats prevailed against Diogenes' obstinacy. He flatly refused to take any steps towards reconciliation with a father who had disowned him and broken his mother's heart. Cornelius therefore determined to seek out John Blake himself. The world was indeed a small place, Cornelius felt, for Blake was a man whom he had often met in the course of business; in fact, many pieces of the Beresteyn jewellery had been acquired from the English merchant.

As soon as the excitement of the Stoutenberg conspiracy had died down, Cornelius arranged a meeting between father and son. He discovered that John Blake was at that time visiting Rotterdam and straightway sought him out and invited him to stay at the Beresteyn house in Haarlem. It was indeed a strange meeting for John Blake and Percy—a meeting fraught with hidden and subtle emotions; on the one side, the dull ache of ancient memories and the sharp pricks of a guilty conscience; on the other, the fierce force of hate and the cold contempt for the coward who had deserted wife and child.

But the call of the flesh proved stronger than hate or

conscience. The father gazed upon the handsome, devil-may-care adventurer and indifference turned to ungrudging admiration. Here was a man to be proud of—a man any father would joyfully acknowledge as his son. The wistful expression of the lonely old man thawed the ice which had frozen Diogenes' heart and, in a trice, the two were locked in one another's embrace, half-crying, half-laughing, with the emotion which overwhelmed them.

Naturally the father, overjoyed that the breach had been healed, wished for his son's company. He also felt that it was only right and proper that Percy should visit England with him; to be introduced to English society and installed as his legal heir—a worthy heir indeed to the wealth and position which he had built up; and also to instil into his son a love for his own country.

Thus did Diogenes sail for England. An old letter written by him to Gilda in Dutch gives us an amusing insight into his first impressions of the country.

"My journey to England," he wrote, "has killed my only attempt at sobriety, for there I found that the stock from which I come was both irreproachable and grave, had been so all the time that I, the most recent scion of so noble a race, was roaming round the world, the most shiftless and thriftless vagabond it had ever seen."

Gilda, however, did not believe him, since it was nearly always impossible to detect when he was joking or being serious. And this time he was joking. He had now seen the stately home; he had breathed the calm air of his native land; his blood had responded to the call. He realised that he was English of the English, and

not just a nameless and homeless vagabond. He felt that he could easily learn to love this rain-soaked country as soon as Gilda should live there as his wife.

England, at this time, was transported with joy; illuminations and bonfires lit up the streets of London all night long! The marriage between Charles, Prince of Wales, and the Spanish Infanta had been definitely broken off. The people acclaimed with enthusiasm the collapse of that shameful policy which had for so long dragged England on the tow-rope of Spain. The return of the Prince from there was taken as a sign of his strength and the complete rupture of any Catholic alliance. Buckingham demanded war! Cranfield was accused of deceit! The Spanish ambassador left London!

So England turned to its only Protestant ally—Holland. James the First sent for John Blake and entrusted to him the mission of winning the Stadholder's support. And the father, proud of his only son, and knowing how high Diogenes stood in the Stadholder's esteem, led him to the king, and it was agreed that Percy should lead the Embassy to Holland, not as a poor vagrant, but as the representative of a mighty nation. The Stadholder showed appreciation of the delicate compliment paid him by the King of England in thus sending to him as ambassador, the man who had saved his life, by readily acceding to the English proposals.

On the successful conclusion of the mission and the signing of the treaty of alliance, King James, realising the signal services thus rendered by John Blake, desired to confer some honour upon him. But the latter, either because he was advanced in years, or because he desired to show some singular mark of favour to his son and to make amends for past wrongs, petitioned His Majesty to bestow the proposed honour upon his only son.

The King agreed to this course and conferred a baronetcy upon Percy Blake. But an initial difficulty arose, owing to the fact, that at this time, no legal precedent existed which permitted a son to take a hereditary title whilst the father was still alive. A compromise, however, was reached; Percy changed his name to that of the village in which his father now lived—a name that was curiously like to his own—Blakeney. Thus it came about that Diogenes, the vagabond, the beggar, the outcast, became Sir Percy Blakeney—the first Sir Percy.

3

But Diogenes—Sir Percy Blakeney—did not remain in England long; his heart was away in Haarlem with Gilda, the lode star which had led him into accepting honour, position and wealth. For himself, he laughed heartily at the very notion that he had now become a baronet of England. So, within three short months, he was back again in Holland, awaiting, with as much patience as he could muster, the day of his marriage.

Nevertheless, the few fleeting weeks had been sufficient to give birth to that strange sense of longing and incompleteness which he had always felt. The call of blood had worked its miracle in him; the green meadows and scented orchards of England had twined themselves into his heart. He was infused with its spirit, drunk with its fragrance, filled with its beauty. After the wedding, he made up his mind that he would return thither with his bride, to dream his life away in love and contentment.

4

But the Fates decreed otherwise. Percy Blakeney did not return to England until 1630. The records show that

he was again called upon to take an active part in the destinies of his adopted country, Holland. Van Aitzema, in his voluminous work entitled *Saken von Staat*, refers again and again to the "Englishman," the husband of Gilda Beresteyn. He is recorded by that chronicler to have been an active participator in the fighting which followed a second uprising engineered by Lord Stoutenberg.

Thus, in the spring of 1626, Van Aitzema tells us that the Dutch were being driven in defeat in front of an invading Austrian army headed by Stoutenberg; that these troops had contrived to cut the Dutch armies in two; that an attack on Arnheim had been successful and that Vorden was menaced with a siege. He relates that the Dutch had been caught unawares and thus had been put to flight, but that the only chance of salvation lay in sending a message across the Veluwe, through the invaded areas, so that the Dutch troops and German mercenaries in the Stadholder's pay could join forces in time to co-operate and perhaps thus avoid total destruction.

"The Englishman," he writes, "undertook this perilous task. By night, right under the mouth of the Austrian musket and cannon, did Sir Blakeney (as he calls him) swim under the Veluwe. For ten long miles he swam; sometimes diving under the icy waters in order to escape detection by the Austrian outposts; sometimes battling desperately against an adverse wind which whipped up the surface of the river and threatened to drown him. But, though spent and severely wounded, he reached Vorden in time to save us from disaster."

Again, a few weeks later, Blakeney, it seems, was leading a detachment of Dutch troops against the Austrians at the "Battle of the Molen," and distinguished

himself in conspicuous style by the capture of Lord Stoutenberg himself. In fact, Van Aitzema declares that it was through Blakeney's fine tactics that the Austrian army was forced to retreat and the uprising finally stamped out.

It seems that from then on Sir Percy Blakeney sheathed the sword Bucephalus and took to the quill. But, in his case, the pen was certainly not mightier than the sword, for he made but little mark in the world of politics, though the Stadholder showered appointments upon him.

In 1627, Maurice of Nassau appointed Blakeney re-organiser of his army. In this he appears to have succeeded remarkably well and was created a general of the Dutch army as a reward for his industry. And he himself has left us a record of his impressions in a long letter which he penned to his father about this time.

"I fear me," he writes, "that I am no clerk. Certainly I am no diplomat. Already have I made enemies with the stolid Dutch colleagues with whom I am supposed to work. They are senseless and wooden-headed, and do not seem to realise that fighting consists of a little more than mere brawn and a straight eye. It really amazes me that these people have ever contrived to win a battle. But one must give them their due; they are a loyal set of men, earnest and patriotic, thinking only of the good of their beloved country and the greatness of it. The Stadholder continues to shower honours upon mine unworthy shoulders—honours which I am totally unfitted for. Thus, he informs me that he wished me to become his comptroller! Imagine it! Diogenes, the vagabond who could never keep a guilder in his purse, practising accounts and learning the arts of domestic economy! Cornelius, that dear man who is my father-in-law, nat-

urally desires me to accept. I feel that my only chance of safety lies in escaping to Blakeney Manor."

In spite of all his protests, Blakeney was persuaded to accept the position, and so his dream of returning to England receded farther and farther into the future.

The only other event during those five years worth recording is the attempt that was made on his life. At least, the happening must be so designated; actually, it seems to be rather of a mystery, and so far, an unsolved one.

To celebrate the anniversary of the "Battle of the Molen," the Stadholder had commanded a military display of all the Dutch troops. This review took place on the banks of the Veluwe, on the old-time battle-field. The principal event in this display was a mimic battle portraying the actual fight of three years ago. For this purpose Blakeney unsheathed his sword Bucephalus and re-enacted his part in the affair. At the critical moment when he was charging at the head of his company, a musket was loosed and the bullet wounded Blakeney in the left shoulder, luckily only causing a flesh wound.

An investigation was immediately set up in order to discover the culprit. It was speedily ascertained that there were many malcontents among the troops—men who resented Blakeney's position as general of the army. But as those men confessed freely to their opinion, it was perfectly evident that none of them would ever have dreamt of attempting a criminal attack upon Blakeney's person.

The soldiers who had been standing near the spot from whence the shot must have been fired, stated that they had noticed nothing untoward and were willing to undergo torture and death should they be lying. The only conclusion to which the authorities could come was

that some unseen assassin had lain in wait and shot at random in the hope of killing Blakeney. But the culprit was never discovered. Blakeney himself vowed that the whole affair was the result of an accident, and begged the Stadholder to drop the matter. Those soldiers who had been implicated in the cabal against Blakeney were pardoned at his earnest request and the affair remains a mystery to this day.

5

In the meanwhile, over in England, John Blake had died and had left his son sole heir to his vast wealth and considerable property. Nothing, therefore, kept Sir Percy in Holland now that peace had been restored. Blake House awaited its future master. Sir Percy took his bride across the water and settled down in England, there to pass the rest of his days in peace.

And so the years passed away.

Atropos cut the thread of life with her scissors, and Diogenes rests in the churchyard of Blakeney beside Gilda, his dearly beloved wife.

And Nikolas, his son, reigned in his stead.

Sir Nikolas Blakeney carried on the tradition—love of adventure cannot be quenched in the “mad-cap” Blakeney. They can never settle down and live in quiet enjoyment; they must always be up and doing, battling for fame and fortune, for the mere sake of the sport itself. And Nikolas was a true son of his father; he fought with Marlborough, going with him from victory to victory; he organised the Dutch allies; he was caught spying for the English generals; he escaped by the skin of his teeth; whilst his wife, Helen Hamilton, waited patiently at Blake with her son, George. But Nikolas never returned. On the eve of the Battle of Blenheim he was

stricken down by a fever and died within a few days—died as all Blakeney's have wished and ever will wish to die, to the sound of the trumpet and cannon, with a sword in his hand.

Sir George Blakeney was a failure! Nothing could induce him to travel or to take up arms. It is to be feared that he was the black sheep of the Blakeney family. The only important thing in his life, one which entitled him to a mention in their chronicles, is the fact that he nursed his grandchild, Percy, the Scarlet Pimpernel, on his knee. He played games with the baby; invented stories, recounted the history of his famous ancestor to this boy, who was himself destined to invent the greatest game of all—who was to be the most famous and most beloved Blakeney throughout the length and breadth of England, the most hated and feared man in revolutionary France. A small, insignificant red flower became a device, the mere sight of which thrilled the hearts of his gallant friends, brought smouldering fear into the souls of his enemies.

And soon a lazy, slightly inane, but irresistible, laugh echoed down the corridors of Blake House. . . .

PART ONE

"ONCE UPON A TIME . . ."

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY MARKINGS

I

PERCY BLAKENEY was born on the fifth of December, 1760, at Blake House.

A deep and lasting sorrow overshadowed the lives of the Blakeney's at this time. Percy was only a few weeks old when his mother fell a prey to the terrible malady which in those days was looked upon as incurable and nothing short of a curse of God. Algernon Blakeney had the terrible misfortune of seeing his idolised wife become hopelessly insane after two years of happy married life. Madness was a stigma which attached itself, so people said, only to those who had erred in life, but since no one could point the finger of accusation at the Blakeney's or the Dewhursts, this sickness, therefore, was regarded as a mystery, a visitation of the devil or a witch's foul curse for some imagined insult. Many looked upon it as a just punishment predestined ever since the time when John Blake had deserted his Dutch wife over a century ago. But these only circulated in private and with extreme caution, since the vast wealth of Algernon and the great social and political influence of Lord Fulford precluded any veiled hints from being uttered in the open. One and all, however, pitied the new-born babe who had entered this world amidst such disastrous circumstances, already predicting a dreadful and miserable destiny for this scion of a noble race.

And indeed, it proved a tragic misfortune for both husband and son; the one thus deprived of the society and joy of a beautiful wife; the other of the tender care of a loving mother. And one can only conjecture how that poor woman must have suffered in the isolation of her deranged brain.

Joan Dewhurst was only eighteen when she married Algernon Blakeney. Her father was a younger brother of the Marquis of Fulford and the alliance was considered a very fitting one, though, according to some, the girl might easily have chosen a husband who stood higher up in the ranks of the nobility, her beauty and accomplishments being famed far and wide. As to Joan herself, she seemed, at first, to have stepped straight into romance or fairyland hand in hand with a Prince Charming who frankly adored her. And the young couple seemed to have nothing but happiness to look forward to in life. But within two years, a distracted husband was forced to leave his home and to take with him into exile a woman who did not even recognise her erstwhile lover, who had wandered away into a land of shadow lonelier and more terrifying than death.

For Percy it was a curious jumble of recollections that eventually emerged from these first few years of life. There was never a connected memory; it seemed as if isolated incidents alone held sway in the boy's mind. Somewhere or other, there were storms at sea, evil-smelling boats, the bustling of strange lands and the din of foreign incomprehensible languages; somewhere else, the green meadows, the lowing of cattle and the serenity of an English spring. At one time, there was the utter desolation of illness and the frenzies of his father; at another, the soft hands of a young woman and the jolly romps with an aged grandfather. But through them all

there was no distinct line drawn between each set of impressions, they being, as it were, mixed higgledy-piggledy one into another, so that he could not tell which was first or which was last; the one evoking, even to his dying day, a sense of oppression and of evil presentiment, whilst the other induced always a feeling of well-being and cheerfulness.

One of his earliest recollections and the first milestone in his life, must have been the sudden collapse and death of old Sir George. The shock was a tremendous one for Percy. Though only just turned five at the time, he remembered every detail of that fateful afternoon when, alone with his grandfather at Blake House and whilst in the act of playing together, the old man stumbled and fell at the boy's feet. The sight of the heavy ashen figure, the noise of the laboured and stertorous breathing terrified him. He watched the still figure with horror and alarm.

In his childish incomprehension of what had happened, he stood gazing down at the lifeless body until a feeling of sudden and utter loneliness surged up within his heart and took possession of his faculties. He remained motionless, hesitating, striving to repel the growing fear which all in a moment had now gripped his mind. He touched his grandfather; he tried to lift him, but the dead weight was too heavy for him to lift. Then the silence of the room suddenly struck Percy with a shock—a shock of awe and dread. He called to the old man, softly at first, coaxingly; then louder and louder until his voice sounded like a shrill shriek which echoed unanswered through the room.

After a valiant battle with himself he incontinently fled from the room. In an upstairs attic he faced the awful truth. The impression of a mysterious, hidden

enemy, who stalked people unseen, striking without warning or reason, was an overwhelming one to his infant mind and remained as vivid in old age as it had been at the time of its occurrence. Thereafter, death became a reality long before it should; an actual person whom Percy endowed with flesh and blood; a person to be tracked down, detected and overcome; an insatiable monster to be cheated, its appetite to be starved.

"I shall never forget," he is reported to have said on one occasion to his intimate friend, Anthony Dewhurst, "my first sight of death. It was so unheroic, so damned stupid, that I was overcome with shame at the idea that it could kill a Blakeney in so silly a fashion."

Algernon, summoned in haste, failed utterly to grasp the situation as it appeared in the eyes of his son.

"Why did you run away?" the father asked.

And Percy, an emotion of strong aversion prompting him, made answer:

"I couldn't help it: I was so ashamed."

2

The aftermath of this episode was to see the temporary break-up of the Blake household.

The French doctors under whom Lady Blakeney had undergone treatment at various private institutions, were now hopeful of a partial recovery and begged Sir Algernon to bring Percy over to France in order that the reunion of mother and son might hasten the desired cure. Hitherto, at their insistence, the father had refused, strongly opposing their entreaties on the ground that the shock might have a deleterious result on his wife and fearing lest it might produce a feeling of revulsion in Percy which might ruin his whole future outlook on

life. The opportunity for the experiment had now, however, presented itself. After the formalities of death and succession had been complied with, the new baronet left the property in the hands of a capable lawyer and set sail for Calais with his son.

The next two years are almost a blank. There exists no exact record of the Blakeney wanderings. That the meeting of mother and son nearly ended in disaster, that the boy ran more or less wild, that Sir Algernon grew more and more morose, is certain. But the details are entirely lacking. Percy never could remember any fixed event during those twenty-four months, so overcome was he by the death of his beloved grandfather, and so bewildered was he by his mother's strange attitude towards him.

Again there were only blurred and faint recollections; a fat French woman who washed clothes and taught him "argot"; a rapid transitory impression of varied houses and queer streets; here and there, some vague picture of tramping dispirited soldiers, of a bunch of ragged children jeering at him, calling him foul names, of long, wearisome journeys in rickety stage coaches.

During this time, however, one very definite emotion emerged, his indifference to his father. On the occasions when they met there was always friction. It seemed as if Percy could never do right—either he was too noisy and boisterous or else too subdued and shy. Percy stood in awe of this strange man whom he scarcely knew and whose moods were so changeable.

Sir Algernon, on his side, could not understand the high spirited temperament of his son. Thus it came about that they bickered and quarrelled continuously over unimportant trifles until at length a definite sense of hostility was born and effectively erected a barrier against

mutual understanding. Percy found himself hugged and embraced one minute only to be repulsed with angry words the next; whilst Sir Algernon was bitterly hurt by his son's unresponsiveness and was deeply offended by the total disregard paid to his wishes.

Gradually, however, Percy learnt to contain his lively spirits, refraining from childish provocation. He appeared, at this time, stupid in the presence of his elders, since he could not adapt himself to their varying moods. On the other hand the atmosphere was not very conducive to friendly relationship, since his father was too deeply steeped in his own misery to give a thought to any one else. He felt that Percy could not share his sorrow and would not understand it. Neither ever attempted to approach the other or to find a common foundation on which to build mutual trust. Thus they drifted apart, the breach widening with the years until they became as strangers.

3

Lady Blakeney, having taken a turn for the worse, was ordered to go to Berlin, where a famous specialist for the mind was achieving remarkable results. Thither Sir Algernon departed in high hopes and Percy found himself once more at Blake House under the care of Anne Derwent.

Anne was only seventeen when she married Captain Edward Derwent, a young and wealthy army officer. The girl had been content with her lot at first; she knew no other happiness since she had passed her girlhood in the religious seclusion deemed necessary in those days for the well-being of maidens in exalted social circles. The honeymoon bliss, however, did not last; she found

herself deserted for mistresses and ballet-girls, until, after five years of misery, she was left a widow, Edward having committed suicide owing to a threatened court martial. Soon after that she was in residence at Blake House under the protection of Sir Algeron Blakeney, her maternal uncle.

Percy adored this cousin of his, who, in gratitude, poured out her starved love upon this boy so tragically deprived of home and companionship. She quickly deigned the streak of romanticism which lay slumbering in his heart, and carefully nurtured it so that it evoked in him a flame which burnt brightly all through his life. Under her guidance life became tinged with romance; every act and thought was invested with glamour. The stories of mythology and the tales of adventure ceased to be mere tales and became actual happenings made real by his vivid imagination. He carried them into his play, treating his games seriously as if they were real events so that, in the end, he would reproduce faithfully but often with disastrous results the incidents recounted in his story books.

Unfortunately, he chose for the "damsels in distress" he desired to rescue as mythical hero, the daughters of the neighbouring squires, and the complaints of Percy's wildness and roughness became so notorious that on several occasions only pecuniary damages salved the feelings of outraged parents. The climax of these exploits nearly brought about a scandal on one occasion. After he had carefully studied the story of Perseus and Andromeda he lured his small neighbour, Mary Ffoulkes, aged nine, out into the park and, having stripped her of all her clothes in imitation of the picture in his book, he immersed her in a stream and bound her to the trunk of a tree. The rescue was carried out to the last detail

and Percy triumphantly brought the girl home, unfortunately forgetting that she was still in a state of complete nudity. Filling the house with laughter, he deposited his frail and dripping burden at her mother's feet, exclaiming:

"I've just rescued her from the sea dragon. I claim the reward of her hand in marriage."

Anne Derwent was as usual the peacemaker and, as soon as Lady Ffoulkes had recovered from the vapours and little Mary was safely tucked up in a warm bed, she questioned Percy.

"But why on earth did you strip the child and immerse her in water? Why can't you play like other children? Why can't you pretend that such things are only a game?"

To which Percy gave the unexpected reply:

"That would not be the same thing. It must be real. What is the good of pretending I am rescuing a princess in distress? She would not be properly frightened if she knew that it was only a game."

And Percy laughed that boisterous and hearty laugh of his which was irresistible. Gradually both Anne and Lady Ffoulkes thawed under its influence so that they could not find it in their hearts to continue to scold.

But these pranks had become too frequent of late to allow them to pass unchecked and Anne grew apprehensive as to the effect of so much freedom and enforced idleness on the boy's moral character. She thought it was her duty to acquaint Sir Algernon with these daily episodes of Percy's life, and at last the father awoke to the realisation that his son was growing up and was no longer in the baby stage. He perceived that Anne was not strong enough to cope with the lad any longer:

but he absolutely refused to leave his wife and take charge of the boy himself.

The result of this was an impasse, a state of vacillation on the part of the father which threatened to have an injurious effect on the boy's entire future. However, there was already something fine and strong in Percy's character, for temperamentally he did not seem to be any the worse for this period of laxity in his moral education. In the end it was Anne Derwent's constant and repeated pleadings that forced Sir Algernon to rouse himself out of his supineness. He finally decided that the time had come for Percy to learn to work. Hence, very soon after this adventure with little Mary Ffoulkes the boy was introduced to books and school studies.

4

During this first dozen years of his life, it was only natural that, as he was constantly passing from pillar to post, Percy should only have received the most elementary education. It is to be feared that he displayed an exaggerated talent for idleness coupled with a total incapacity to master the principles of hard work. With no fixed abode, lessons and discipline had been out of the question or else reduced by fits and starts to the absolute minimum at the kind though somewhat incompetent hands of Anne Derwent, so that the boy learnt to hate school books and took no pleasure in erudition.

On the other hand his early travels had inculcated in him a knowledge of men and affairs far in advance of his years; and with that imitative capacity inherent in most children, he had picked up without conscious effort a remarkable fluency in French for one so young, which

language he soon spoke not only idiomatically, but without the slightest trace of foreign accent.

Up to his seventh year he had been allowed to gratify his every whim and his chief delight was the pursuit of all sport such as a boy of his age could indulge in. From his earliest days his physique had been above the ordinary. He was broader, taller and stronger than most boys of his own age. His well-knit little body and his long legs never seemed to tire however great the strain put upon them. He was able to outrun and outbox the country lads. And he hunted with the local hounds, never boggling at fences or refusing the exhausting cross-country runs.

But this freedom was not to come to an abrupt end. In consequence, Blake House saw a succession of tutors, for the most part worthy schoolmasters or clerics who, desirous of increasing their meagre stipends, were loath to give up a lucrative post and took the line of least resistance.

One and all were sent away or resigned their duties through sheer inability to make any headway with the boy, though Percy was very far from being stupid. He had a rooted aversion to Latin and Greek and neither threats nor promises of reward induced him to alter his opinion. In mathematics he showed a marked genius for the business side of figures—a genius doubtless inherited from ancestor Blake. At the early age of ten he could keep an account book and ledgers, and computed compound interest. But the higher branches, such as algebra and trigonometry, frankly bored him, so that his teachers soon gave up the attempt of driving these into his head.

Above all, Percy showed a marvellously inventive faculty for getting rid of his tutors and he contrived to play on them some of those mad pranks of which he was

so fond. A Mr. Horace Webley suffered very severely at his hands. To him, Percy took an instant dislike and determined to rid himself of his unwanted presence: this he duly effected by the simple expedient of tying Webley up in a disused barn and leaving him there for twenty-four hours. The poor man had to rely on a pile of green apples for his sole sustenance, thereby enduring such torture of colic that he could hardly walk to the London coach next day.

"Thank goodness," Percy exclaimed that same afternoon to Anne, "I hated Webley; he was always so greasily dressed."

5

Sir Algernon, over in Berlin, was duly notified of his son's wilfulness and waywardness, but obstinately closed his eyes to the root cause of it all. Sick to death, however, of the eternal complaints which reached him from England, he decided to have the boy educated abroad. As luck or chance had it, he was called to Paris on business. He therefore sent for his son to join him there. For the next six months Percy lived in France with his father. Only one notable incident occurred during this stay.

In Paris, Percy had occasion to learn swordsmanship. He managed, though only nine years old at the time, to learn the intricacies of sword play as practised in France. He subdued his strength and bulk, turning them into a neat and precise machine under the control of his brain and eyes. His master, one of the champion fencers of Paris, was astounded not only at this English boy's diligence, but also at his wonderful capacity to master the complicated ripostes and elaborate parries then in vogue, which he executed with a flick of his iron wrist as if born to the art.

Since the fashion and the rigid rules of etiquette then pertaining to the aristocracy in France considered duelling the only possible method of wiping out an insult, the sons of the nobility were gathered together in the *Cercle d'escrime*, there to receive the requisite training in sword play, and be taught to conform as closely as possible to the unwritten laws of their elders. Thus duels between children were of everyday occurrence and though Percy, being an English boy, was averse to settling quarrels in this foreign fashion, he was often dragged into what was called in those days an affair of honour.

In the annals of the Club there is enscribed a date with the names of two boys who fought a duel on a memorable occasion. The story forms part of the archives of two noteworthy families. The date is January 10th, 1769, and the names are: Percy Blakeney, aged nine, and the Vicomte de Bonnefin, aged eleven.

The young Vicomte had been watching Percy lunging desultorily at a padded target; a patronising, somewhat contemptuous smile curled his lips and suddenly he snatched the épée from the English boy's hand with the insolent remark:

"You cannot expect an English booby to lunge gracefully," and he proceeded to give Percy a lesson in the art. "All Englishmen are bullies," he went on with the same impudence, "but this one is mad."

Percy, whose youthful temper was not under that control which he achieved in manhood, merely knocked the braggart down and rescued his sword. Thereupon uproar ensued: it was an insult, a challenge, more portentous and venomous than any of those petty quarrels that occurred in the Circle. It was a direct challenge from perfidious Albion to Madame la France.

Within a few minutes, in shirt sleeves, the young

opponents stood face to face, surrounded by an angry crowd of boys all of whom were partisans of their own compatriot. Percy was alone, unsupported, except by the fencing master who, supervising the fight with commendable impartiality, encouraged the English lad. Unfortunately the Vicomte, though two years the elder, was no match for the calm impassivity and the steel wrist of Percy.

It became obvious from the beginning that France was getting the worst of the encounter, and England seemed deliberately to heap insult upon insult by disarming the opponent at every opportunity, and returning his sword with a mischievous look in a pair of lazy blue eyes. Indeed, for Percy, the whole episode had by then developed into a joke and become not a little ridiculous. In England fists would have decided the quarrel and he felt that this smacked of the theatre. The affair became silly and distasteful to him; he lost interest and fenced with as sure a wrist as before but more mechanically.

Then came disaster. The boys were now both cross and tired: the foil play grew wild and uncontrolled. The Vicomte hurled himself impotently against his tormentor. Percy, staggered by the unexpected attack, was not able to parry sufficiently quickly to avoid an accident. The shock of the onslaught sent the French boy's épée clashing to the floor. The lad staggered. Percy, thrown off his balance, slipped and his sword pierced de Bonnefin's right shoulder, inflicting a very severe wound. The Vicomte slithered to the floor and, with scarcely a groan, lapsed into unconsciousness. In those days surgery was still in its infancy: the wound did not prove mortal, but it became septic and the arm had ultimately to be amputated. De Bonnefin went through life with one arm and enfeebled health.

When paying his respects to the boy's father, Percy said ruefully:

"Sir, why don't you fight with fists like I learnt to do in England?"

6

Just after this episode, in the month of February of that year, Lady Blakeney seemed to recover her senses: her health was better and an improvement in her mental condition became markedly noticeable. So Percy was immediately dragged to Berlin.

A childish letter, treasured by Anne Derwent, gives us an amusing insight into Percy's mind when he first went to Germany.

"My dearest cousin Anne," he wrote six weeks after his installation in Berlin, "The Prussians are beastly people, I hate them all. I am not allowed to play those lovely games that we played together last year. Everybody is so stiff and they do not know how to enjoy themselves as we used to.

I wish you were here. You would laugh at Hans who thinks such a lot of himself. He is a coward and would not fight me. He said such a thing was simply not done and that boys in Germany did not behave so stupidly. I like Mister Ingram. He is English and I stay with him, but I wish he would not talk German all the time. Father says I must learn to speak it and Mister Ingram gives me lessons every day and gives me cakes if I learn well. Hans does not like Mister Ingram who teaches him English. I don't think Mister Ingram gives him cakes after the lesson.

Father rides with me every morning. I love that. The German soldiers are very smart, but very ugly.

Dear cousin Anne, do come and take me away."

As a matter of fact the journey to Germany had a great and lasting effect upon the immature lad. The laxity and the offensive morals of the French had made a deep impression upon him. His duel with de Bonnefin with its sad consequences, and his association with young boys who had never been taught to put a curb upon their desires had developed in him a sense of revolt against his father's strict discipline, and especially against the life which he knew that he would have to lead in England sooner or later.

"Sir, let us live in France for ever," Percy is reported to have said to his father when he first heard of the imminent departure for Germany.

But German respectability, the outcome of the spirit of Martin Luther, exercised a more steadying influence on his character. Here in Berlin he learnt many useful lessons in decorum and manners. The effeminate and elaborate courtesies demanded in France cut no ice in Germany. Percy found himself laughed at by his equals and often deliberately snubbed. This brought him down to earth and he soon realised that frivolity and love of pleasure were not the real hall-marks of a gentleman and that personality was the only thing that counted.

Such a complete reversal of childish ideas might have been a task beyond the ordinary powers of a mere lad. But Percy, though still very young, had already a certain strength of character—though most people who knew him at the time would have denied it—this helped him no doubt to surmount many difficulties and to bend his

young mind to this entirely new outlook on life. The lesson was hard, but he learnt it in the end.

Then, within the year, came the death of Lady Blake-ney: this was a merciful release for all concerned after nearly ten years of sorrow and terror and it put an end to Sir Algernon's foreign wanderings.

He returned to England with Percy and took up residence at Blake, endeavouring to gather up the threads of a tangled life. But existence seemed a paltry affair for this disillusioned and unhappy man. Though friends and relations gathered round him to ease his loneliness and to apply the healing balm of friendship to his wounds, he could not forget the tormented years. The stress of continual worry and the strain of perpetual anxiety had added years to his age and put a blight upon his mind which nothing seemed to cure or even alleviate. He sank deeper and deeper into the gloom of misery and wretchedness, unable to endure the slightest reference to the beloved departed. A restlessness, born of this spiritual ache, forbade him peace: it pushed him to the grave-side of his wife in his longing to be as near as possible to her earthly remains. He became a wanderer on the face of the earth, knowing no rest.

In the meantime Percy was growing up in this brooding, mournful atmosphere.

7

Anne Derwent, in spite of her sense of gratitude, found herself antagonised by Sir Algernon. Though she had devoted all her energies to the education of Percy and the maintenance of the estate, Sir Algernon did not seem to appreciate her loyalty: he certainly never rewarded it. After a few months Anne, wearied and dis-

pirited, cast about for an excuse to leave Blake House, but all her attempts in that direction were frustrated by Sir Algernon who seemed incapable of managing his house and his estate without her assistance.

But a young and pretty woman cannot continue to live in the house of a rich widower without causing a certain amount of scandal. Though the village knew how closely Anne was related to the Blakeney family, the gossip-mongers soon spread unpleasant rumours. These rumours were carefully kept away from Sir Algernon's ears, but they were freely discussed in taproom and bar parlour. Gradually, however, gossip grew more bold and an inkling of it filtrated through to the neighbouring gentry, with the result that Anne found herself stared at in the road and on more than one occasion was subject to open insult.

Anne Derwent was no fool. She realised quickly enough that her position would soon become untenable and, hardening her heart against the separation from Percy, she forthwith packed her trunks. Sir Algernon raved and fumed when she broke the news of her imminent departure. He threatened to have the law upon the slanderers: he pleaded with her to remain if only for Percy's sake. But Anne, glad of an excuse for leaving Blake House, refused to be turned from her purpose.

After her departure, others, both friends and relations, followed her example. Though they pitied both Sir Algernon and the boy, Percy, from the bottom of their hearts, they felt that they could not face a long visit at Blake House, and contented themselves with writing occasional sympathetic letters which generally remained unanswered.

Sir Algernon hardly noticed the gradual falling away of his circle of friends, steeped as he was in memories of

the past, but he did try to settle down and to give his son some kind of home life. Unfortunately, he had lost the power of visualising a parent's duties and neglected the most important ones, either through lack of knowledge or total indifference. In consequence, Percy was thrown on his own resources and quickly developed a tendency to run wild with the abandon of a savage. His father thereafter found life very complicated; he was at an absolute loss how to cope with the boy and generally alternated between the extremes of severity and the limit of leniency. Frequent chastisements, however, had the effect of irritating Percy into worse excesses until, at length, Sir Algernon found home life well nigh intolerable; row following row with painful regularity.

Most of Percy's pranks, since "maidens in distress and tutors to be tortured" had been banned, now consisted in expeditions wherein horseplay and rascality were most conspicuous. These pranks were generally carried out with the co-operation of the farmers' boys recruited from the neighbourhood—boys who readily accepted the young gentleman's leadership either from sheer admiration of his pluck or fear of his hammer-like fists.

These escapades consisted in raids on neighbouring farmyards, carried out with audacity and cunning, chiefly to the detriment of live-stock; one farmer discovered his cows unable to leave the stable because all their tails had been tied together with rope; another noticed that his prize white pigs had been painted over in patriotic colours. There naturally followed stormy interviews with irate farmers, ending in severe inroads on the Blakeney income and a sound beating for Percy, until Sir Algernon finally realised his own total incapacity to deal with his turbulent son.

He therefore came to the conclusion, with a certain

amount of personal satisfaction, that the best way to be rid of Percy would be to send him to school, a proceeding which solved the problem of education for the boy and relieved the father from further responsibility.

So the boy was sent to Harrow and Sir Algernon packed up his trunks and returned to Paris.

CHAPTER TWO

FAGS AND FISTS

I

PERCY was sent to Harrow at the age of twelve. To him, school was a word totally devoid of meaning, but the idea of living in community with two hundred or so other boys of various ages did convey a sense of excitement and of thrill to his young mind; even though he felt somewhat dismayed at the thought of regular and systematised lessons. The few stories of brutal discipline which had reached his ears at different times left him cold and unmoved since the fear of birch and cane was nil, and he felt that his powerful physique, aided by his skill in boxing, would relieve him of the unwanted attentions of any bully who might attempt to bait him. But the preliminaries of departure were highly exciting and entirely to his taste. There was the visit to Lord Fulford who had signed his nomination papers: there was the pleasure of buying new clothes, there was the joy of seeing London for the first time.

Any nervousness which he may have felt towards the approaching reality of school was rapidly dissipated by the delight of being treated as a grown-up man by his elders. The stories of past Harrovians and their exploits as recounted by Lord Fulford, thrilled Percy. In spite of his foreign and haphazard upbringing, the associations which Harrow had with the great names of English history and the traditions of the old school, not only

enthralled his romantic heart, but fired him with enthusiasm for his future life there and created in him a pride that he should have the honour of adding his name to its list.

Young Percy would have been saved many weeks of toil and bodily exertion if Sir Algernon, who was not a public school boy, had not said aloud in the school ante-room:

"Well, Percy, this is Harrow: hope you'll like it. I shall stay here for a few days to see how you settle down and to hear what the Headmaster decides about you."

Probably fifty or more of the two hundred Harrovians must have overheard this piece of fatherly solicitude: and for these lads there was plenty of humour in the fact that a boy of twelve should be accompanied to school. But still more comic was it that the father should put up at Harrow for the night in order to watch over the entry of his young hopeful. Sir Algernon, by offending against this unwritten law which forbids parents to accompany sons on the opening day of term, had placed Percy at an unfair disadvantage since Harrow was an arena where you must be a hero and stand upon your own feet, if you were to escape ridicule.

The next morning he was examined in the library by three masters, and gave a very doubtful account of his learning. The two M.A.'s, after testing his classical knowledge, expressed their views in unreticent language. Doctor Robert Sumner, the Head, however, mindful of Lord Fulford's personal influence with the board of Governors' soon discovered Percy's miraculous fluency in two foreign languages, his practical notions of geography and his absorbed interest in history which put him on a better footing with the other masters. So Percy was admitted to the school, though into a class below that of

boys of his age. Luckily Sir Algernon was resigned to this verdict, he had not expected any other and was indeed highly gratified that the lad had passed the simple tests at all.

Father and son thereupon parted and Percy returned to his house, where he was shown into a dormitory wherein were several beds and, not knowing what to do, he lay down on one and fell fast sleep. He was quickly awakened by a douche of cold water which some one was gently squeezing out of a sponge down his neck. By the time he had returned to full wakefulness, his aggressor had fled and only the sound of running footsteps dying away down the corridor and the echo of mirthful and mischievous laughter revealed to Percy that he had not been dreaming, but had, indeed, been the victim of a mild rag.

Seething with rage at thought that his tormentor had escaped his just wrath, he did not intend to sit quietly under the insult. He resented most of all that he had been taken unawares and had been found guilty of sleeping when he felt that he should have been awake; he was angry that he had placed himself in such a ridiculous position at the very outset of his school career. He ran hurriedly down the stairs to seek out the offender, but was met in the ante-room by a monitor who led him into the hall and introduced him to the other boys.

As the quizzing stare of a hundred pairs of eyes was riveted upon him, Percy nearly lost his self-composure, but, pinning his faith in brawn, he drew himself up to his full height, conscious of his perfectly fitting clothes; he achieved an elegant bow and sat down in the place allotted to him. During the meal, twinges of uneasiness coursed down his spine and he was haunted with the suspicion that all the boys knew of his discomfiture; he

felt that he was surrounded by grinning faces which seemed to be enjoying the joke perpetrated at his expense. He observed, however, that though most of the glances levelled in his direction were humorous, there certainly was no malice apparent in them.

He found that he was to share a room with three boys—young Lord Bathurst, Andrew Ffoulkes and William Pitt.

That evening, he should have undergone the inevitable and usually extremely unpleasant initiation at the hands of his elders, but, deeming that a policy of aggression was to be preferred to one of passivity, he came to the conclusion that it would be better to pick a quarrel than to have one forced upon him. He therefore strode up to Bathurst, the biggest and most powerful in the room, and scrutinised the latter's clothes in obvious and undisguised scorn.

"What a disgusting fit!" he said coolly. "Really, Bathurst, you must permit me to introduce you to my tailor. Just look at that demmed seam."

And he ripped up the other boy's beautiful velvet coat from tail to collar. The other two stood aghast and gaped at the impudence, but its show put a temporary stop to the processes of initiation and the night passed off fairly comfortably for the new boy. In the morning, however, the rule was that every boy should walk naked over the stone floor to the bathroom; in winter this was an extremely uncomfortable proceeding, but to a new boy it was a very trying ordeal. Ffoulkes grinning at Percy declared loudly that "Blakeney's flesh was too demmed white to be tolerated."

Whereupon Percy had two fights on his hands within twenty-four hours of his arrival.

In the first hours of school, Percy's colossal ignorance

on almost every subject struck not only the masters, but the other boys themselves. Ordinarily, ignorance in a new boy elicited a good deal of sympathy, but rumour of the insult to a head boy had gone the round of the school; it was felt that expressions of sympathy might not be welcome and Percy was left severely alone. But this state of isolation did not last long. That very afternoon he was able to show his superiority in fisticuffs as well as his ability to impose his will on others. Accompanied by the usual ceremonies, he fought both boys in the milling ground beneath the old school yard, and, after the double fight, walked off the field not only twice a victor, but already the acknowledged leader of the junior aristocratic set.

Thereafter life went on comfortably enough for Percy. He made friends with the three inmates of his dormitory and the quartette presented a united face to the rest of the school.

Though Harrow was a small republic, yet there were two distinct parties among the boys—those who were peers or heirs to peerages and those who were not. Even amongst the former class, there was a line of demarcation which, though never openly referred to, was none the less clear. This consisted of the “ancients,” as they were called—men who could boast of an ancestor who had come over with the Conqueror or fought in the Crusades—and those who had only recently been ennobled.

Within these subdivisions there was complete public solidarity: the boys voted, played games, and acted generally in unison, even though in private bitter feuds would often be waged. The “ancients” in their pride of birth drew a distinct social line between themselves and the newly ennobled, whose swagger and assumption of aristocratic ancestry they both mocked and despised.

Nevertheless, they were ready to admit into their innermost circle any boy who happened to be either very rich or a fine athlete, even though his grandfather had been born in the gutter.

Popularity was not easily won at Harrow in those days, even if a boy became a "blood" or a scholar. Respect, admiration and a circle of friends could only be won after several years, when, either through good luck or charming personality, a boy arrived at the monitor stage. But strangely enough Blakeney was an exception to this rule.

None of the boys quite realised how it was that he had become such a popular figure in the school in so short a time, in spite of the great drawbacks of being only a new boy and a fag. His dandified dress, his indolent and indifferent ways, his witty and often acid sallies, his inane and infectious laughter on all and every occasion, would in the ordinary course of events, have been branded as nothing short of impertinence and would have brought down on his head the collective wrath of Harrovians. But somehow he escaped the usual punishment meted out to eccentricities. He naturally ran the gauntlet of the innumerable raggings to which a new boy was invariably subjected.

At first, he was singled out for especial treatment in this respect and received rather more than his full share of horseplay at the hands of the few who resented his polished and somewhat foreign manners. The Lower School ragged him just to see what he would do, and to provoke him to further exploits. His fists were kept busy at first, but soon many ceased their unwelcome attentions because they found their baiting too painful to themselves. Brute force is always admired by the very young and Percy's physique earned him the respect of

his fellows and thus he gradually acquired that ascendancy over them which had in the beginning puzzled the majority.

Somehow, at school singing, when it was his turn to stand upon the hall table and to sing a song to the accompaniment of jeers and raucous shouts, no one interrupted him though his voice certainly did not strike the choir-master as deserving of a place in the chapel choir. This and other incidents of a more or less trivial nature showed the extraordinary hold which Percy had over his schoolmates.

On the other hand, he cheerfully accomplished the menial duties assigned to him as fag, never grumbling whatever the task. The captain of sports found in him a ready and powerful ally. The school clubs soon felt the weight of his presence. The rags of a more serious nature were developed more accurately and expeditiously under his suggestions. Above all he never bragged of his exploits nor did he ever adopt a pose of swagger. On the contrary, towards the boys he adopted an attitude of jolly companionship without the slightest hint of superiority.

2

The winter term proved to be a happy one for Blakeney in spite of its inauspicious beginning. The only favouritism he never won was that of his tutors. They tried to cram him with knowledge, without, however, the slightest success. In point of fact, he was straightway put under special supervision and extra studies in order to catch up arrears of work. And, strange to say, Percy managed to accomplish the effort demanded of him for after a short month he was put back in his own class and allowed to resume the normal studies.

From the first, Percy took a great liking to the head-master, a sort of sympathy having sprung up between them. The boy saw in the strict disciplinarian a human being who, beneath the outward guise of authority, knew every boy's failings and weaknesses. Face to face with any of them, the cold dictatorial exterior would drop and the mask of sternness replaced by one of infinite understanding. Percy, throughout his Harrow career, never came to grips or at cross purposes with the Doctor, nor did the latter ever have cause to repent his seeming laxness as far as Percy was concerned.

With regard to the under-masters, all the boys treated them with that tolerant contempt which characterises the English public schoolboy. Percy saw no reason to diverge from this attitude and ragged, skimped impositions and was inattentive with the rest, there being little or no contact with the masters outside the class-rooms. Percy disliked the maths "beak" and aped his drawly and pompous voice to the vast amusement of the boys; he tolerated the Latin master because he was sorry for the obviously earnest and seriously minded man; he openly laughed at the French master for his utter ignorance of that language. Only towards his erstwhile tutor, Horace Webley, who had now obtained a post as assistant theological master, did Percy show open hostility, never having forgotten their previous relationship.

Otherwise his life was no different nor yet more exciting than that of any other Harrovian in the year of grace 1772. Percy at this time had no feeling for tradition and was indifferent to the past, since his father had not been in the school before him, and he cared little for the future in his relation to Harrow as he was too young to visualise the inner significance of the great school or its influence upon the minds of its scholars.

3

As soon as the holidays came round, Percy went to stay with the Dewhursts since Sir Algernon was still in Berlin in order to be near the grave of his wife, and he did not wish to have the schoolboy mooning around him.

It was indeed fortunate for Percy to have such an amiable and gallant protector during those vital years of adolescence, Lord Fulford giving him as much care as he did to his own children. For the first time in his life Percy, admitted as he was to an intimate family circle, tasted the simple joys of a true domestic and happy life.

In the home of the Marquis of Fulford he saw and felt all those touches and links which he had missed through no fault of his own. From these charming people he learnt the real hard battle of life and the principles which ought to go to the making of a perfect English gentleman. The rather wild barbarian became transformed; he fell under the charm of Lady Fulford whose influence on him was immense. She softened his rather ebullient and rough ways: she taught him the necessity for self-control, for the government of his equals and the proper and just dealings towards his inferiors, the art of give and take, the sense of loyalty and patriotism, and above all, self-esteem and the pride of bearing.

During the first holidays in London he met those members of his own set who, later on, would be his companions. He also spent a week-end with the Earl of Chatham and was introduced to young Sheridan. So that one wonders whether Harrow or Lord Fulford had the privilege of shaping this raw material into that which he became—the most gallant gentleman of England.

The few weeks flew along on swift wings all too

quickly and the coach took Percy and Anthony Dewhurst, well provided with tips and hampers, back to Harrow. As the horses galloped down the Harrow Road, Percy was more silent and grave than was his wont. He was now beginning to understand the position which wealth and a future title meant.

4

The following term a school rebellion broke out which nearly turned into a miniature revolution. The origin of the trouble was a flogging. The chief personalities were Percy and Webley.

That term Percy found himself in the form over which his one-time tutor presided and all Percy's hate surged to the surface again, and unmindful of possible consequences, he immediately started on a campaign to render the master's life intolerable. In this pursuit he was ably seconded by the rest of the class. Within a week, while the headmaster was temporarily absent, Webley, having heard of some particularly audacious prank in the school, suspected Percy of being its originator and instigator and demanded an explanation.

Percy, who in this instance happened to be entirely innocent, refused, true to school traditions, to divulge the perpetrator's name. Webley, already driven to exasperation by Percy's torments, not only cross-examined him with extreme severity, but also, having ordered him to his room, administered a sound thrashing which was doubtless from Webley's point of view richly deserved, but at that juncture distinctly injudicious. The boys, in revolt at such autocratic and unwarranted treatment, were up in arms; the flag was hauled down and the water turned off; the immemorial Harrovian custom of show-

ing extreme discontent. This was tantamount to a declaration of war.

On his return Doctor Sumner faced a grim set of boys. He straightway set up an investigation which lasted throughout the night. The boys sat up, discussing the situation, while boy after boy answered the summons from the hall. And as each hour passed the tension grew intense, the Head and the boys realising that a decisive battle was being waged. A boy could be forced to sneak on a school-fellow at the instance of any of the masters, and, should he refuse, the punishment would be a thrashing. Such was the issue in Harrow eyes.

From a theoretical point of view such a procedure was allowed by the rules, but it had never received legal sanction and the School was determined that their rights should be preserved at whatever cost, the majority of the boys declaring their readiness to undergo any punishment even to expulsion so that the immemorial tradition of "no-sneaking" might be kept inviolate. Only a few—mostly scholars and plebeians—formed a minority: and these were tactfully warned of the risks they would run should they deem fit to persist in this hostile opinion.

By the middle of the night, the original cause of the dispute having been lost sight of, a search was made for the actual organiser of the revolt and for the boy who had hauled down the flag and taken the key out of the water cistern.

Since no way out of the impasse could be found there was only one honourable solution and this, after many hours of deliberation, Percy carried out. Order would be restored straightway in the school and the offender would own up to the Head in person on condition that his confession be treated in the spirit in which it was made and no further punishment inflicted on any one,

and on condition also that the boys' rights in the matter of "no-sneaking" be in future respected.

That same afternoon the flag flew and the water flowed. Thereafter peace reigned in Harrow School once more; excitement gradually subsided and the rebellion died a natural death.

Percy's reputation was greatly enhanced by his tactful handling of the revolt. His prestige was high both in the eyes of the masters who had for the most part been all along on the side of the boys, and in those of the Harrovians themselves who considered that they were fortunate indeed to have had the affair so quietly and deftly settled without painful reprisals.

Percy Blakeney was thereafter the leader of the aristocratic set and received not only their congratulations, but also their gratitude in the form of special privileges. Thus, although still a member of the Lower School, he was let off fagging in the future, allowed a comfortable chair of his own and permitted to take his baths in private.

For the next two years he indulged in his favourite recreation, sport in all its forms, boxing taking first place. He was able to knock out the instructor who had been a noted prize-fighter in his time. Another diversion which earned him great credit was running, cross-country steeplechases or hares and hounds being his especial fancy since his endurance could outlast all pursuers, his long, lanky legs enabled him to outdistance rivals within a few yards of the start.

For this prowess in sport, he was, in his second year, elected to the Philathletic Club and obtained the captaincy of boxing, fencing, running and also the mastership of the hunt. Later on he was to graduate into the coveted ranks of the "Bloods"; his election took place the

following summer at the annual general meeting amidst universal applause. To his extreme satisfaction his friends Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Bathurst were elected at the same time, the dormitory thus housing three out of the seven members of the famous and exclusive "Blood Club."

5

After three years at Harrow, Percy, to his vast surprise and amusement, found himself a monitor.

In the interval the ups and downs of school life had passed quickly and uneventfully. Though by nature an idler, Percy was by no means lacking in intelligence. He possessed a quick and receptive mind, an amazing memory for facts and figures and an able brain. His teachers were often infuriated by his slovenly work and apparent stupidity, and they had just cause for complaint since he never seemed to show a desire to exert himself at lessons. It was a standing grievance with the classical master that he refused to work for the scholastic honours which his ability undoubtedly deserved.

Instead, Percy had perfected a system whereby he contrived to do the minimum amount of work required to avoid impositions and beatings. The system at Harrow in those days whereby a boy obtained promotion (remove as it was called) at least once a year, unless he was totally unfit for it, enabled him to climb slowly, but surely, from the Lower to the Upper School, ultimately attaining, somewhat precariously, the dignity of a sixth-form boy without having worked very hard for the honour.

But even if these years had failed to make a scholar of him, they were the means of forging those great

friendships which were destined to last a lifetime, friendships built on varying foundations.

The original sharers of the dormitory, Andrew Ffoulkes, Edward Bathurst and William Pitt, linked themselves together in enduring bonds tacitly acknowledging the leadership of Percy Blakeney. Though they were just schoolboys they had already discerned in the companion those magnificent qualities of courage as well as of cunning, of magnetic personality and the power to command, of irresistible gaiety and charm whatever the predicament, which later on in life called forth their unqualified obedience. At Harrow these three being inseparable, earned the nickname of the "Three Devils," since no escapade or freak prank was ever carried out successfully save at their instigation.

They once held up the London to Hertford mail coach in approved highwayman fashion, and, having revealed to their victims their identities and intentions, they sent the proceeds of their robbery to a well-deserving charity. They ruled the juniors with an iron hand, put a stop to all bullying and to all unwarranted outbursts of childish rebellion. They even, by means of the subtle art of "sidetracking," reduced a too presumptuous master to subjection and by physical force deposed a too bumptious monitor. The headmaster was quite willing to admit that the influence of the "Three Devils" was all for the good of the school, and that whenever they brought a request to him he was always ready to give it his earnest consideration and to grant it when possible or reasonable. Hence, their unexpected promotion to monitor rank.

Strangest of all was the close friendship between Blakeney and William Pitt. It was a friendship which brought

Percy much of the help and consideration in high places of which he subsequently stood in need in his work of mercy.

It was a case of extreme opposites meeting; Pitt admired Percy's wonderful physique and fearlessness, whilst Blakeney paid tribute to the other's capacity for hard work and moral courage. At first, Percy only showed towards his friend that tolerant contempt which the athlete has for the bookworm. Later it dawned upon him that Pitt was more than a plodder, was, in fact, a genius, and contempt was thereupon turned into genuine and generous admiration. He accepted quite humbly the rebukes and the railings which Pitt levelled at his idleness; and so great was Pitt's influence over him that presently the masters noticed an unaccountable improvement in Percy's school work. Soon it became known that Pitt was under Blakeney's especial care and that any one who wished to tease or bully the studious boy had first to reckon with Blakeney's fists.

Pitt was Ffoulkes' fag. When Percy was released from performing menial duties after the brilliant part he had played in the school rebellion, he set himself the task of helping to perform his so as to enable his friend to study without interruption; and when he in his turn became a fag master he made his own young slave carry out duties for Pitt, until such time as the latter could command a fag for himself.

The Earl of Chatham, at his son's request, sent a holiday invitation to Percy and, after he had listened gravely to his young visitor's exploits as recounted to him by William, he remarked:

"Damn it, if I only had you in my ministry I would defy Bedford and . . . hm . . . even the King."

Which remark Pitt was soon after to remember in a

manner and at a time that caused his friend Blakeney much consternation.

6

It was soon after his elevation to monitorial rank and in the beginning of summer term 1775, that Percy received a summons from the headmaster. This was to apprise him of the sudden death of his father in Berlin from heart failure. The boy was granted long leave from school. The Marquis of Fulford, who was one of the trustees under Sir Algernon's will and appointed Percy's guardian until the latter's majority, acted once again in that spirit of kindness which he had always shown to the Blakeney's: he took the carrying out of all the legal formalities on his shoulders, as well as the doleful task of bringing the body across from Germany to its last resting-place in England.

Percy Blakeney, at fifteen years of age, found himself a full-fledged baronet and the possessor of a vast fortune. His feelings in the matter of losing his father so unexpectedly must have been very mixed. He had never understood and never loved that father. The first sense of bereavement, such as it was, was soon submerged in that of childish pride in his own wealth, and of enjoyment in having the freedom to spend.

Lord Fulford's guardianship was of the kindest and most easy-going where pocket-money and expenditure were concerned. He was one of those men who believed in allowing growing boys as much freedom of action as their character warranted.

For Percy the mere fact of losing his father could not have perturbed him: love as between father and son had been entirely absent in their relationship towards one another and their intercourse remained devoid of all

sympathy and understanding. The boy had no real cause for weeping: no apparent cause for sorrow. No thread in his life had been snapped: no loving memory broken. On the contrary, he was now given new hopes for the future and he seems at this stage to have let life roll on as before, just as if nothing of any great significance had happened or any radical change in his life had occurred. This attitude he summed up in a letter to his guardian in answer to questions relating to his new estate.

"I cannot," he wrote on his return to Harrow, "go about with a long face. I hope you, sir, who so well understand my family, will perceive that I am not unfeeling or lacking in gentlemanly instincts. The reverse of the case is the truth. I glory in the fact that I am entitled to be called 'Mister' Blakeney by the masters instead of my surname *tout court*. As to my future, I am very undecided. I hope that you will permit me to remain here for another two years at least. Frankly, the University does not attract me, but I may enter politics with my good friend Pitt. Or else I shall roam about the world a bit. I suppose the truth is that I do not know what I want."

The school round and the onerous monitor's duties soon drew him back into Harrow life again, and his bereavement was forgotten in the everyday excitement of writing lists, preparing lessons and supervising meals. His drawl of a voice convulsed the school when first he read the lessons in chapel: his attempt to sing in the choir gave the music master a stomach-ache. On the other hand he kept the junior school well in order, and never had there been such quiet during preparation as when Blakeney was in command.

The illicit joys of breaking bounds and drinking at taverns were quickly suppressed amongst the Lower

School, though many an afternoon saw Sir Percy and his three friends in the bar parlour playing cards. Likewise he seems to have kept a stable and to have gone hunting regularly once a week, though how he managed to do this is difficult to conjecture, for this form of sport was strictly forbidden by the law of the school since London was only a few hours' ride away. But authority, in those days rather partisan, winked at Percy's misdemeanours, so long as his iron discipline over the Lower School remained unchallenged and unimpaired.

And he took those prerogatives for granted as if they were his due. He never stopped to consider the ethics of his conduct and whether he was setting a bad example to others: the boys, on the other hand, allowed Blake-ney's defiance of the laws to go unchallenged, because they realised that he was a good sportsman, always willing to turn a laugh against himself and that he never lost control of his temper even under the most severe provocation.

Since Percy seemed to have no inclination for any special branch of learning, the problem of his future exercised his tutors far more than it worried their pupil. They mapped out several careers for him, pointing out with infinite pains the advantages to be gained from the Law, the Army or whatever happened to be the proposal of the moment. But all they encountered was rebuff accompanied by an inane and merry laugh and the invariable remark:

"Lud, sir, I'm too demmed lazy. What you propose requires brain not brawn."

Lord Fulford, at whose home Sir Percy now stayed on all occasions, when told of these well-meaning meddlers, threw up his hands in horror, exclaiming:

"For God's sake, Percy, behave decently like a gentle-

man. There is no earthly necessity for you to work."

With which statement Sir Percy heartily concurred. However, now and again, books were read and annotated, a few notes were written in the margin: an occasional brilliant essay was painfully born, for at eighteen, Percy was fired with the zeal of saving England from the hands of traitors—these foul men being Rockingham, Fox and others. His admiration for Pitt spurred him on to the nearest approach to hard work ever yet done by him, and, before leaving Harrow for good, he had pledged himself to stand by his friend as soon as the latter should be Prime Minister.

The masters, perceiving the futility of ever persuading the youth to undertake a serious career, soon dropped the subject, for which Sir Percy was eternally grateful.

7

And thus his last term came all too soon. By that time, with universal consent and general acclamations, the school had elected Blakeney head of the Philathletic Club; the masters, for reasons best known to themselves, had promoted him to the dignity of "School Monitor," one of the select "twelve," and for the short period of thirteen weeks, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., could boast that he was, in truth, the head boy of Harrow, both in work and in play.

As the day of ultimate parting drew close he experienced the strange, yet fruitful emotion of regret. He looked back and saw, in a new perspective, these years of boyhood; the lost opportunities, the waste of time, the compelling atmosphere of tradition. The years had sped by on golden wings and there seemed to be nothing to catch, nothing to stop and gaze at with awe or

with pride. The larks were now reduced to absurd futilities: the revolts diminished to inconsequent follies.

In a moment the proportions appeared reversed, in inverse ratio to their former significance, as if the events were fleeing before the onrush of infinity, whilst dwindling down to zero. Boyhood was gone: he was now a man and must emerge into a man's world—a world in which there was no room for petty grievances or harsh authorities. And others would step into the shoes so lately shed: new monitors would take his place, new boys would sit in the empty form: new "Bloods" would replace the old and everything would continue on the Hill as if he had never existed.

The old Hall reverberated for the last time to Sir Percy's laughs, to his quips and jests, which echoed through the sacred Yard. On his left and right sat the quartette. They pledged each other in sound, full-bodied port, drunk from tankards.

"We meet in London, my hearties," roared Sir Percy Blakeney, "this day week, and, by God, we'll paint the old town red!"

Forty years on, when afar and asunder
Parted are those who are singing to-day,
When you look back, and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play,
Then it may be, there will often come o'er you
Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song—
Visions of boyhood shall float then before you,
Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along,
Follow up!

CHAPTER THREE

PRANKS AND POLITICS

I

ENGLAND was in an extremely critical state at the beginning of 1779. A great discontent had spread throughout the land; the navy was disorganised, divided against itself by party politics; the army was consumed in inactivity on the American continent; the colonies were menaced by greedy enemies; trade was slowly dying, strangled by acts of piracy. The ministers had lost the confidence of Parliament and of the nation and were rapidly losing confidence in each other. Alone, in the cabinet, His Majesty was strong, though considered obstinate, battling for the rights of the people, the power of the government and the prerogatives of the British crown.

At Drury Lane, in deference to the King, who was an avowed admirer of Handel, the season was composed of oratorios. Most nights the Royal box was occupied either by His Majesty himself or a member of the Royal Family. Among the latter, George, Prince of Wales, secretly loathed serious music, though he tactfully forbore to say so and he hated going to the theatre when it became his turn to attend. Of late, H.R.H. had noticed a young man in a neighbouring box, always exquisitely dressed, who appeared to hold the same aversion to Herr Handel's oratorios as himself, since, after the first few bars, deep

resounding snores would proceed from his direction. The young prince, curious at first, became interested in the youthful dandy and sent his tutor to investigate the matter. The latter returned in due course with the information that the person in question was Sir Percy Blakeney.

The young prince became excited. Surrounded as he was by the rigid etiquette of the Court, which did not allow him much latitude, he hoped that this unknown young exquisite would prove to be the congenial companion he had always wished for: the prospect of finding at last a friend whom he would choose for himself, and one who could not fail to find favour with his Royal father, caused him to overcome his childish diffidence and to summon this Percy Blakeney to the Royal box. On receipt of the command, Sir Percy, with a swift glance at the set of his cravat, followed the tutor and presented himself to the Prince, whose first question to him was:

"Sir Percy, since you so obviously dislike music, why do you attend the opera?"

With a low bow, Blakeney made answer:

"Your Royal Highness, I beg to make my excuses and hope that I did not disturb you. Begad, sir, I find Drury Lane the only comfortable place in which to sleep a few peaceful winks."

Whereupon H.R.H. whispered complete agreement and begged Sir Percy to keep him company at least for that performance.

From this rather fanciful encounter sprang an intimacy which, between the heir to the throne and Sir Percy, was to last a lifetime, a friendship which embraced not only these two, but subsequently their wives and families. At the time of this meeting the Prince of

Wales was seventeen years old and Sir Percy the elder by two years.

Blakeney, in after life, sometimes referred to this meeting with the Prince. In a diary written some years later, he gives us a picture of the heir to the throne at that time and one or two intimate details of their friendship.

“He was an engaging youth in some ways. He was always very ill at ease when in the presence of strangers, and I remember concluding at the time that he was probably kept tightly on the curb. I fancy, however, that he must be a bit of a thorn in the side of his father, and, if I am any judge of character, he will not be a successful king. Although but seventeen when I first met him, he showed ugly tendencies even then—tendencies which I would not have tolerated in any person in my own set. I suppose that a future king must be allowed some license. Begad, I thank my lucky stars I was not born a royal personage.

“I remember that night when he insisted on being taken to Warren’s Den, a pretty low-down haunt in those days. He drank far too much for a young lad—his head for liquor was always demmed weak—and I was prickly with fear lest he betray himself to the girls who seemed to dote on him. In the end, I had to remove him forcibly ere the pace became too hot.”

Judging from diaries and contemporary letters written both by and to Sir Percy about this time, it seems pretty certain that he was drawn into Court circles and became a great favourite at St. James’. In one or two letters there are distinct allusions to the young prince, looking up to him and following his advice on the subject of clothes and deportment.

They became inseparable companions during those early days of their intimacy and were seen in one another's company on every possible occasion; they rode together nearly every morning; they fenced and boxed nearly every afternoon, and, whenever feasible, for-gathered in the evenings. And as the years passed, so did this friendship grow. It was not merely that the Prince enjoyed Percy's sallies and jokes, or that his clothes were the most beautiful in London; it went much deeper than that, right down into the core of the mind, a subtle sympathy had flown between them that night when both had been so unutterably bored by the high-flown harmonies of Herr Handel and out of this a real understanding had been born.

And, indeed, this new influence in the young prince's life was considered by many to be the very best thing which could have happened, and was encouraged by the much harassed tutor, who was often hard put to it to keep the heir to the throne away from other rash and evil friendships. Sir Percy found himself in a new rôle and one which he had never studied, that of mentor to the prince, and he seems to have greatly enjoyed the position.

As was only to be expected, petty jealousies soon came nosing round this intimacy between Prince and commoner. Gossip, none too clean or kind, busied itself with their names. Those who, for some reason or other, had been refused entrance into Court circles, chose to deride Sir Percy Blakeney for accepting Royal favours; they chose to discern in his acceptance either personal ambition for higher honours or a mere bid for popularity. But neither the Prince nor Blakeney was perturbed by these scandalmongers, the majority of whom had their being on the fringe of society.

There was the usual flood of anonymous letters, one of which seemed to have caught Sir Percy's fancy, or tickled his sense of humour, for he kept it among his family papers.

"Sir," writes the nameless correspondent, "would it not be more honourable and more becoming in a gentleman of your exalted standing and wealth to earn the honours which you evidently so ardently covet by serving your country rather than by currying favour with a certain august young man? Doubtless, with your genius and personality, you can lead him down any path you choose, but the writer of this letter deems it is a disgraceful and shameless action to have initiated the said personage into a life of debauchery and licentiousness when you could have done so much good to your country by elevating his morals.

"One who, at least, has at heart the good of his country and the dignity of the English Crown."

With the exception of this one letter—more virulent than most—Blakeney treated all anonymous letters with the contempt they deserved, consigned them to the wastepaper basket and their writers to the nethermost regions.

"Another batch of these demmed letters," he wrote in his journal on December 5th, 1779. "Zounds, people must be frightfully bored with life if that is the only subject they can think of to chatter about. *Entre nous*, H.R.H. needs no lessons on the art of debauchery."

It certainly sounds paradoxical that a boy like Percy Blakeney, then only nineteen years of age, should have

counted the friendship of the equally young Prince of Wales for the purpose of social advancement. He needed none, for he was rich and had a large circle of friends, and what is more to the point, he had ever since early boyhood, scorned both flatterers and sycophants, whilst his one ambition was to exact all the enjoyment out of life that his great wealth put within his reach.

2

That he contrived to realise this ambition is amply proved by the records of the next two years. The most exclusive circles in London and in Bath received him with open arms: within six months he was the acknowledged leader of fashion and of style. Sir Percy's coats were the talk of the town: his inanities were quoted by all his circle of friends, whilst his foolish talk was aped by the gilded youth at Almack's and on the Mall. Society accepted him, petted him, made much of him, since his stories were the wittiest in London, his wines and parties the most sought after in England. In fact, he was looked upon as the ideal model for the fop and the philanderer.

One section of London society openly laughed at him and were wont to declare that Blakeney was the "demmedest ass that ever graced a drawing-room," whilst another kept his company solely because they wished to partake of his popularity and hoped that they would be noticed in the same room as the Prince of Wales. Others again were frankly puzzled by the young man, and could not make up their minds whether he was just a dandy without brains or a really clever man, masquerading for some particular purpose of his own as a fool.

This picture of Sir Percy Blakeney, painted by the gossip of the time, does not tell us much about him per-

sonally, nor does it enlighten us as to his real character. Actually, it is a mere sketch of the superficial man—just that aspect of him which he chose to show to the public. It seems to have been the general opinion of his world about him at that time. But a closer study of the period tends to prove that that opinion was an entirely erroneous one.

As a matter of fact, there is a vivid description of Sir Percy Blakeney, written by a man of great culture who was a contemporary of his and who seems to have known him quite intimately. After a long discussion anent the various meeting-places of London society and their frequenters, in his *Reminiscences and Personalities*, Sir Edward Egmont devotes a chapter of his book to the London Clubs and in it describes his first meeting with Sir Percy Blakeney.

“ . . . It is wrong to imagine that all the young men who frequent the fashionable London Clubs are thus degenerate and debauched. There was one young man in particular whose personality was so forceful, so arresting, that, though it occurred over twenty years ago, I can remember my first meeting with him as vividly as if it were to-day. Sir Percy Blakeney, baronet, was undeniably handsome—always excepting that lazy bored look which seemed habitual with him, like the mask of an inane fop. Six foot three in his socks, as broad as a prize fighter in full trim, every inch of his figure seemed to radiate hidden strength. His forehead was low and square, crowned with thick fair hair, smooth and heavy: deep-set, somewhat lazy blue eyes beneath firmly marked, straight brows, and in those eyes there was an intensity behind the apparently lazy look, a latent passion which lit up his face whenever some subject dear to his heart was mentioned. But he seemed purposely to

subdue those flashes which revealed another nature, almost as if he were afraid that they would betray the secrets so jealously guarded by his habitual lazy look.

"Many scoffed at him; many laughed indulgently at him. There were some who ridiculed his rather obvious foreign manners. I was told over and over again that, though no one could call him dull, every one thought that he was hopelessly stupid.

"But I divined in this rich and pampered pet of society, a depth and an understanding far beyond that of those who judged him thus lightly. His exquisite clothes were but the outward sign of his great love of beauty in all its forms. I doubt whether Blakeney could have existed without beautiful things around him. And his love of beauty pervaded his everyday life and manifested itself in many forms; for are not charity and honour and chivalry forms of beauty? I quickly discerned the shrewd brain behind the inane speech; the moral courage behind the lazy look. I knew that before me stood a man who would soon astonish those who dubbed him foolish and who would soon play an important and leading part in the history of the world. . . ."

Percy, of course, though still very young and under the nominal guardianship of Lord Fulford, could give rein to his every whim and caprice wherever these might lead him. Nor did his guardian greatly trouble himself to interfere. What did it matter? The Blakeney fortune was more than sufficient to meet its young owner's demands.

"If," said Lord Fulford, with an attempt at cynicism, "Percy intends to go to the devil, why the deuce shouldn't he, and in his own fashion? He is rich enough to buy the freehold of Hell and its contents and he will!"

Be it said, however, that Percy Blakeney was neither a debauchee nor a gambler, and that no one knew this better than his guardian and trustee.

It was about this time that the bulk of the ancestral property was sold. Percy found that an obscure village, miles away from the beaten track, was somewhat in the nature of a white elephant and of no particular value to the pursuit of his enjoyment. He kept the house itself, for sentimental reasons probably, together with a few acres of land, but the rest of the property, which was rich in pasture and arable, was bought up by the local farmers, and with the proceeds of the sale Percy bought a house on the river at Richmond.

Richmond House, as it was known at the time, and which Sir Percy rechristened Blakeney Manor, rapidly became the centre of fashionable society. Soon, everybody who was anybody or considered themselves anybody, not only accepted Sir Percy's invitations to routs and parties, but greedily cadged for them whenever possible. Richmond became the rendezvous of the *élite* of society, and the Blakeney water parties, an invention of his own, became famous throughout the fashionable world; they drew the rank and fashion by chaise or coach to the small village by the river, there to enjoy the young exquisite's lavish hospitality.

The luxurious furnishings, the priceless pictures and rare books which he had collected or inherited, attracted the connoisseurs; his wines soon brought the gay sparks, young and old, around him like flies, and his horses won for him the esteem of the sporting fraternity. Added to which the fact that, perchance, the Prince of Wales or some other member of the Royal family might be encountered in this intimate and friendly atmosphere, set the seal of social approval on Blakeney's position.

But these favours and this popularity were not won gratuitously. Sir Percy had to pay the price of his extravagances; and a very big price it was, too, for money in those days was more scarce than it is now. But he was always willing to pay. He liked to live *en grand seigneur* and was more than ready to indulge that fancy, though always within the limit of his fortune.

In these days, when it was more or less the fashion for gentlemen—young ones especially—to be up to their eyes in debt, Sir Percy Blakeney never owed any man anything. He hated contracting debts and never allowed a bill to become overdue. Dull he might be, stupid he often appeared to be, but in business transactions he was both scrupulous and methodical. Those who were wont to dub him an inane fop whose thoughts ran only on cards and clothes, might have paused sometimes to consider how it came about that the Blakeney millions, whatever their provenance, were not only efficiently administered, but had even of late been considerably increased.

The existing accounts of Blakeney Manor show that Sir Percy must have spent a small fortune on its installation. Originally, the house, with its grounds sloping down to the river, had cost him nearly twenty thousand pounds to buy, but he had also poured money inside its four walls, decorating, renovating and furnishing the rooms in sumptuous style. Besides which, the actual upkeep of the place, even in those days of low wages and long hours, must have run away with an enormous amount of money.

The staff consisted, we are told, of eight gardeners, a dozen women servants, a French chef of international repute, with his attendant scullions and kitchen wenches, a highly paid butler and a number of lackeys. To these

must be added Sir Percy's own valet, and valets and maids specially kept for the service of guests. Then there were the stables, where Sir Percy kept over twenty horses both for riding and driving, with a large contingent of coachmen and grooms.

His personal expenses were also on a lavish scale. His wardrobe was a marvel of elegance. These were the days of elaborate and at times sumptuous clothes; of velvet coats and brocaded waistcoats, of lace cravats and ruffles, of silk stockings and jewelled buckles. Sir Percy affected a style which might almost be called superfastidious, but at the same time he contrived to wear his clothes with so much grace and elegance that he never appeared effeminate or over-dressed.

From this somewhat superficial sketch of Sir Percy Blakeney culled from scraps of contemporary writings, it must not be inferred that his interests in life were wholly given over to extravagance and the pursuit of pleasure. He was still very young at this time and chiefly engaged in sowing a crop of wild oats before settling down to the serious business of becoming a useful member of society. There is no doubt that even then, there were stirrings in his heart and mind all tending towards an ideal, as yet immature.

Roughly speaking, he already had vague aspirations towards something fine and beautiful, but he did not know what that something was likely to be. Already he had a real hatred for everything that was ugly or base, and above all cruel; the sound of a child crying, or an animal in pain, would rend his heart-strings and the sight of some bully ill-treating a small, defenceless creature would cause him to see red. His powerful fists were often in requisition on such occasions.

3

But though Sir Percy Blakeney was as it were the sun around which revolved the several constellations of London's *jeunesse dorée*, he did not forget his studious and staunch friend William Pitt. Many hours of relaxation did he spend in the latter's house, discussing politics and tilting at the reputation of party leaders.

Pitt had won a seat in the new Parliament which met in October, 1787. The King's speech was firm against the continuance of the American contest, and bitterly resentful of French interference in favour of the rebel colony. The debate on the address was carried on with acrimony on both sides of the house; tempers waxed hot and language often became immoderate. The ministry was obviously losing the confidence of the nation, whilst Fox, as usual, incurred the King's aversion by a series of insults levelled against what he called "The sacred shield of majesty interposed for the protection of a weak administration." He acknowledged the Sovereign's personal virtues, but declared that "his whole reign had been one continued series of disgrace and calamity."

It was at this juncture that Pitt and Sheridan were first heard in the House of Commons. Pitt's first speech in Parliament in support of Burke's Bill for administration reform created a veritable sensation. Curiosity to hear whether the mantle of the great Chatham had descended on his son, soon yielded to unqualified admiration. The young orator stood up fearlessly amidst a circle of brilliant statesmen and spoke in a voice so harmonious and in language so well chosen and eloquent that both parties accorded him ungrudging praise.

Sir Percy Blakeney had a seat in the Strangers' Gallery,

and there was not a man in the House to whom Pitt's instantaneous success gave as much joy and gratification as it did to his one-time schoolfellow.

That same year on the occasion of the King's birthday, there was a magnificent reception at Court; many were present who had never been honoured with an invitation before. Members of the Government, the House of Lords and the House of Commons were present in full force, and as the aristocratic element was predominant in the ministry, the brilliance of the scene surpassed that of all previous years.

Sir Percy Blakeney, we know, was present on that occasion. He had made up his mind to attend, because of his firm determination to be of service to his friend William Pitt by introducing him personally to His Majesty and to the Prince of Wales. The Prince in any case was always ready to fall in with his friend Blakeney's views and to accept his friend's friends as his own. There seems to have been no doubt whatever in the minds of such writers as Glynde and Egmont, that it was Blakeney's influence at Court that procured for Pitt the following year the Chancellorship of the Exchequer.

And Pitt was the first to recognise the true worth, the energy and the extraordinary powers of organisation that lay behind the mask of inanity and foppishness, so persistently worn by Blakeney. He did indeed try to drag him into the meshes of a parliamentary career.

"Dear Percy," he wrote on August 10th, soon after his elevation to Cabinet rank, "I feel that your presence in the House on our Benches would strengthen the Government's position. The coalition between Fox and North was concluded yesterday, and announced to the House at a late hour last night. We all baited these old

rivals as violently as we could, but North slept peacefully during our most offensive personal attacks. You could manage that side of our politics in a much more brilliant and worthy manner than any of us! The King is furious and is trying by every means in his power to break the partnership. Our only hope is that Fox, either through his ill-considered attacks on His Majesty or through impetuosity or imprudence, will one day go too far. I do not think that the coalition will have a long life.

"What an arena the Commons is. You really must join us if only as a target (this is Sheridan's idea), but better still as a battering-ram. At any rate think it over."

Less than a year later, he had again occasion to congratulate himself on possessing a friend whose tact and discretion, in this instance, saved the Cabinet from a serious embarrassment—one, in fact, which very nearly brought about the wholesale resignation of the ministry and probably the dissolution of Parliament.

"Now my dear friend," Pitt wrote on this occasion to Sir Percy Blakeney, "I am to beg a favour of you. The King has in mind the setting up of a separate establishment for H.R.H. I have just received a communication to that effect. The King has declared most emphatically that no heavy burden shall thereby be laid on the nation, and, with this end in view, he is willing to give 50,000 sterling to the Prince out of his own civil list. All that he will ask from Parliament is a lump sum of 60,000 sterling for initial expenses. I happen to know on the other hand that the Cabinet wishes to vote an annual income of 100,000 sterling to H.R.H., but the King is violently opposed to this. Try to talk to H.R.H. and ex-

plain the situation to him so that both the King and Parliament may be satisfied."

Blakeney accepted the onerous task, promising to do his best, but well knowing that he would not find it easy. To begin with, the Prince of Wales had lately very much angered the King by his constant association with Fox, who, in this instance as in most others, was at once in opposition to the Sovereign. Why the Cabinet should have been so eager to spend the nation's money at a moment when its finances were in a very parlous state it is difficult to imagine. But there it was.

His Majesty was willing to forgo 50,000 a year from his civil list in favour of his son, but the coalition ministry, which included several of the Prince's friends, wished to give him a regular settlement of 100,000 a year, the same as had been granted to Prince of Wales before this. And the King rejected this proposal most emphatically on the grounds that so large a sum would only bring a crowd of parasites fawning round the person of His Royal Highness, and that in any case the nation could not afford this expenditure right on top of a disastrous and costly war. And this rejection was couched in terms of such acrimony that the ministers threatened to resign in a body.

"For God's sake, Blakeney," Pitt now wrote to his friend, "influence H.R.H. into a moderate view and entreat him to obey the King's discretion. Otherwise there will be a change of ministry, a proceeding which would be most injurious to us all at the present moment. Our time has not yet come."

The affair in the end passed off better than most people expected. The Cabinet's somewhat extravagant offer

was put down by half; the Government escaped defeat and the King was overjoyed at his son's more reasonable frame of mind. The upshot of it all was that Sir Percy received his first honour at the hands of his king, his name appearing on the next honours list as knight commander of the Order of the Bath.

"Dear William," he wrote to Pitt after the investiture, "I was only too happy to use any influence I may have in the pursuit of your plans, but you need not have gone to these lengths of making a public exhibition of me. Damn it, you ought to know by now how I should hate any reward for the small service I may have rendered you. You were a sly fox to get His Majesty to lay his sword across my shoulders. I should not have thought you capable of such a treasonable act towards a friend. But beware! I'll have my revenge on you some day!"

4

But if Blakeney imagined that, after these strenuous exertions, he would be allowed to dream away his time at Blakeney Manor and sink back into his lazy and indolent life, he was vastly mistaken. Pitt was now Prime Minister of England, and thereafter Sir Percy was given no peace. From then on, he was bombarded by his friend with entreaties to stand for Parliament, and to his utter astonishment, Bathurst and the happy Harrow band added their voices to that of Pitt. He was offered what was practically a safe seat. Unwillingly, yet pushed by some vague desire to serve the country which he loved with an intense if secret ardour, he acceded to these "demmed monstrous" demands and anon found himself a Member of the House of Commons.

His first sensation was one of hot anger against those who had pushed him into it; faced by the awful solemnity of that august assembly, and, in the presence of that gathering of brilliant and cunning brains versed in the art of politics, he felt comparatively, nay, hopelessly out of his element.

His entrance was greeted with derision. Those in the House who knew him—and they were mostly members of the Opposition—hooted and poked fun at the dandy from Richmond. Cries such as “straight from the Royal nursery,” “the dissolute member from Richmond Fair,” and so on were shouted from all sides. But Pitt had risen, and, as he led his friend to a seat immediately behind the Government benches, a hush fell upon the assembly. This signal act of Pitt’s was more eloquent than any sharp-witted gibe. Amidst the silence that ensued, Sir Percy settled himself down comfortably, stretched out his long legs and surveyed the House through his spy glass. The scrutiny was ironical and the lazy blue eyes gleamed with impish malice. Leaning over Pitt’s shoulder, he remarked, half-audibly and with an affected drawl:

“Begad, but I’ve never encountered such a set of ugly mugs collected in one place before.”

And his inane laugh went echoing for the first time round the solemn confines of the House.

Blakeney’s sojourn in Parliament, however, was not of long duration. The official reports go to prove that he did not take an active part in the acrimonious debates that were so prevalent at the time, nor did he seemingly show any marked talent for oratory. Pitt, on the other hand, often declared that, to have Blakeney close to one during any decisive debate, amply compensated for lack of brilliant rhetoric on his part. His witty remarks or

quaint sallies usually timed to perfection and his frequent bursts of laughter when a scathing attack had been launched against his friends were worth many votes at division time. His intimate knowledge of continental affairs was of great value to the Cabinet whenever questions on the Government's foreign policy were on the paper.

Pitt attempted in vain to cajole him into accepting a minor office in the Cabinet, but to this suggestion Blake-ney opposed an adamant refusal.

"Zounds, man! You cannot expect me to talk on abstruse politics! Think of the damned mess I would make of it all!"

He made one or two speeches in support of the Government policy, mostly in answer to the spiteful attacks initiated by Fox. These speeches opened the eyes of many, both enemies and friends, to his undoubted ability if only he would take the trouble to exert it. One speech in particular is worthy of record for it caused the opposition to writhe, so skilfully did he find the chinks in its armour and pierce it with withering ridicule.

"Maître corbeau sur un arbre perché . . ." he began, and then inveighed against the "renard" and that animal's sly method of obtaining the succulent fruits of office. His travels abroad, he said, forced him into the position of warning the House against France. He told them of the discontent against Louis XVI. He advised them to beware of France, and predicted that, before the century was out, England would have to protect her vast possessions from a greedy and unscrupulous revolutionary Government. He finished his speech by saying that his party was being cajoled into opening its beak too wide, and that, if they were not careful, *le renard* would run off with the cheese.

The report of this speech soon spread through the Clubs and among the haunts of the gilded youth. At Almack's Blakeney was fêted by his cronies, and the chaff was not always good natured. But he took no notice. Already after nine months of politics, he was beginning to regret his precipitate decision to enter Parliament. Indeed, the notion of a political career for Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., K.C.B., was, from the outset, an anomalous one. For he was not a cadger after office or honours; in fact, his feelings in such matters were very much the reverse of self-seeking. The very idea of being pushed into the limelight was thoroughly distasteful to him and, as time went on, this desire to hide his light under the proverbial bushel grew into positive fanaticism. And now that he had entered the political arena and been able to judge for himself of all the corruption, the dishonesty, the double-dealing that was not only condoned, but openly flaunted, he realised how thoroughly out of place amongst so much moral turpitude was any kind of ideal or aspiration towards political integrity. He saw high offices, votes and honours bought and bartered and sold to the highest bidder, and his very soul revolted at the sight. Much as he admired and esteemed his friend Pitt, who, he knew, was of an unshakeable honesty, he could not disguise his rancour before him when he inveighed against party politics.

"Damn it," he said to his intimate friend Ffoulkes, "to think that we are governed by a band of thieves and blackmailers. Poor old England! Heaven guard her!"

Nor would he admit the excuse that, after all, since no one knew what went on behind the scenes, it did not greatly matter whether members of the Government thieved and bribed, were honest or corrupt, since it did not seem to injure the country, which specious argument

would throw Sir Percy Blakeney into a greater fury than before.

But what chiefly influenced him in his decision to abandon a political career was his horror of injustice and his immense sympathy for the under dog. His attempts, during his time in Parliament, to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the submerged were either met with rank hostility, or at best received with complete indifference. Time and again he threw himself with ardour into debates upon the existing social system and the problems of unemployment and relief which confronted the people of England, but his eloquent appeals were doomed to failure from the outset and generally strangled at their first inception. The ministers were far too busy with their own quarrels and his fellow members too jealous of their own political future to trouble about such trifles as the starving poor.

For once, that magnetic personality of his had failed to attract. And, indeed, Blakeney felt but little incentive to exert his powers to the full; he was soon sickened by the growing hostility shown towards the measures he tried to introduce. He was humiliated by his inability to influence his fellow members and to divert their thoughts from their own petty jealousies. After two years of patient striving to gain some amelioration in the Poor Laws, he realised that he was wasting precious time and breath on an ungrateful task. His undoubted talents had no chance of expansion in the House; it did not seem to require courage, ideals or selflessness to gain honours and high position, but only backstairs intrigue and bribery.

A particularly acrimonious debate, initiated by him for the purpose of introducing a new law in connection with outdoor relief, set the seal upon his purpose.

Close to Richmond there was a slum area where the

homeless poor and the outcasts of society collected. These wretched people were driven from pillar to post by the police, and for the most part ended their lives in gaol. Blakeney wished to alleviate their extreme distress, but found to his consternation that he could do nothing on a comprehensive scale without the sanction of Parliament; even though he himself was willing to provide the money for an institute where they could be fed and sheltered. He set down on the motion paper a proposal for the amendment of the law then in force. He castigated with no uncertain tongue a Government who allowed such a state of affairs to continue. He demanded of them certain grants of money towards the rescue of these unfortunates. The rest, he declared, would be subscribed by private individuals.

"For God's sake, stop that man Blakeney," exclaimed Fox. "We required the time and the money for more important work than soup-kitchens. How the devil can we govern this land with such fellows in Parliament? This House is not a philanthropic institution!"

"Unless you help such poor miserable beings now, you won't have any country to govern," shouted Blakeney furiously. "Wait until the revolution is upon us."

He was so disheartened and so disgusted at his failure that that very night he applied for the Chiltern Hundreds.

"Though your motives, my dearest of friends," he wrote to Pitt, "are, in my eyes, both noble and just, those of some of your followers are demmed disreputable. Therefore, since I cannot countenance their ways, I hope that you will accept my retirement in the spirit in which it is offered and that you will not take it amiss or feel that I am a backslider. I hope to see you next Mon-

day week at Blakeney Manor for dinner. H.R.H. will be there, and he wants to talk to you."

That Sir Percy could have satisfied the highest ambitions of the seeker after honours cannot be denied, for, after his retirement from the House, and before the next general election, Pitt tried to force a peerage upon him, the King having decided to strengthen the Government in the Lords by creating five new peers. But Sir Percy firmly refused:

"MY DEAR, DEAR WILLIAM,

Have you completely lost your sense of humour? I am vastly honoured that you should deem me a worthy subject to decorate that ornate chamber, and I daresay that it is a good place wherein to sleep off one's midday bottle of port. But Lord Blakeney of Blakeney—damme, the joke is too good a one, and I could not support a coronet on my head. Please accept the humble apologies of your friend. The best of wishes for a handsome majority at the elections and my best wishes for your future, which I shall follow with loving interest. In the meantime, do not entirely forget your prize black sheep who is always at your service.

PERCY."

And that was the end of Sir Percy Blakeney's two years' political career.

5

There are several versions of what became known in Sir Percy Blakeney's set as the Mary de Courcy episode. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who was his most intimate friend, strenuously denied that Percy was even in love with her;

but others would have it that, at any rate, at first, it was a case of *la grand passion*.

The episode occurred in 1787, and Mary de Courcy, a pretty blonde with languishing eyes and a rosebud mouth, was its heroine. The truth is that fashionable London did wake one morning, rub its eyes and stare when it discovered—or thought it discovered—that the dandy who had the reputation of being the sleepest, dullest, most British Britisher who had ever set a pretty woman yawning, had seemingly fallen in love at last. Yet the fact remained. Sir Percy, so 'twas said, was in love with a lady of noble birth; at any rate, he was paying court to her with as much earnestness as his laziness permitted.

The Honourable Mary de Courcy, though inclined to laugh at his intentions, was secretly flattered by the honour conferred on her by the acknowledged leader of fashion and had soon made up her ineffectual mind to win this pearl of great price in the matrimonial market. To become Lady Blakeney should prove no difficult task, she thought: and the exalted position ought to be a sinecure with such an easy-going man as Sir Percy.

Anyway, it was worth relinquishing girlish illusions in order to become the wife of one of the richest men in England, even though he did not display the fervour of an ardent lover. But, as her girl friends remarked, Blakeney was not the type of man to write odes to his mistress's eyebrows or to fall on his knees in an ecstasy of passion. They reckoned that Mary could easily forgo the transports of love for the privilege of being admitted into the intimate Royal circle and the right to spend a fortune on dress if she chose. The pros so outweighed the cons that the girl's head was completely turned by Blakeney's somewhat halting proposal of marriage, and

it seemed that nothing more was needed but a fashionable wedding.

Now, according to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who was the only man likely to know for certain, Sir Percy's views on the subject were not very clear. To his best friend he confided the fact that he did not know what disease he had caught and supposed that he was just mad like all the Blakeney's. He did not—naturally, perhaps—put his feelings on record in his diary, but Sir Andrew did subsequently declare openly that the whole thing amounted to this: Blakeney had realised that marriage for him was something of a duty. A man in his position was under obligation to marry in order to carry on the title and to have a woman presiding over his household.

Besides, he was thoroughly tired of the match-making dowagers who buzzed around him like flies, bombarding him with their wiles and their often unattractive daughters. Far better, he thought, to get oneself tied to some ineffectual maiden and be, thereafter, totally free to do as one liked. And Mary de Courcy seemed to fit the case exactly. She was exceedingly pretty; he was definitely attracted to her, liked her, in fact, well enough, and, as far as he knew, she seemed to reciprocate his feelings such as they were.

Unfortunately for her, Mary prattled.

When her avowed intentions stood revealed and Sir Percy was allowed a glimpse into her mean, petty little soul, he was so disgusted that she was quite taken aback, not to say frightened, by his sudden show of anger. There ensued a terrible scene during which neither kept their tempers or concealed their hidden thoughts. The lady was more furious at losing the prize than at the bitter truths hurled at her. Sir Percy was not only angry, he was touched to the quick, his pride was reduced to

dust, by this chit of a girl—that Blakeney pride which had so often before caused misunderstandings between him and his friends.

Mary raged when it dawned upon her at last that this was no lovers' quarrel which could be patched up with kisses, but was indeed the final blow to her cherished dreams of position and wealth. Sir Percy withdrew into his shell, a sadder but wiser man, realising for the first time, that wealth had been the main attraction for Mary, and not girlish affection for himself. He left the interview with bitterness in his heart and outwardly more cynical and flippant than before. But later on, when the fire of his wrath had died down and left his brain clear of passionate anger, he realised what a lucky escape he had had. Indeed he was, in his heart of hearts, thankful that he had discovered Mary's secret thoughts in good time, for already, almost unknown to himself, he had tired of her silly little ways and childish affectations.

After the engagement was broken off, honour demanded that Sir Percy should efface himself, go abroad, in fact, until such time as the scandal had blown over and the lady was safely married to some other man.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THAT DEMMED CLEVER WOMAN . . ."

I

THE political situation in France was causing the English Government grave uneasiness. The reports from the British Embassy in Paris were anything but reassuring and often contradictory, being for the most part full of dismal prophecies based on rumours and gloomy commentaries upon the situation. According to these reports the King appeared willing enough to grant reforms demanded of him, but seemed incapable of taking definite action or of sticking to his word. He made promises which he was too supine to fulfil: he gave with a free hand one day, only to draw back the next.

His constant tergiversations exasperated all the parties, and tired even his most loyal adherents. On the other hand it was an open secret that even these adherents did not stand in a united phalanx round the throne. The nobility was divided against itself. Some of the younger men had imbibed the philosophy of Diderot and Rousseau and appeared ready to relinquish some of those feudal rights, beloved of their elders. The Church, too, was feeble, weakened by internal dissensions, and the example set by a number of priests, of extravagance and immorality.

Pitt, whose policy was one of peace, became very anxious; he was worried by the news from the Embassy, whilst the men whom he had sent to France to spy

out the country returned with tales which were often contradictory. He was determined to retain at all costs a friendly attitude towards France, and at the same time to keep a close watch on the extremist party over there. Any sign of a revolutionary outbreak would, he knew, break the thin thread of international peace, and England, who had only just begun to recover from a disastrous war, could certainly not afford to embark on another. He was averse to the drastic step, suggested by the King, of recalling the Ambassador; but he was conscious at the same time of the necessity of sending a shrewd and tactful man of unimpeachable character over to Paris on an unofficial mission, a man who could be relied on to gather reliable information.

Circumstances and opportunity provided Pitt with the one man whom he could trust with such a delicate mission, one who would certainly be welcomed by the exclusive Royalist set in Paris by reason of his birth and education, and who, moreover, spoke French with such perfect purity of accent that he could with equal ease mix with the populace without arousing their suspicion. That man was Sir Percy Blakeney. And Blakeney, forced to go abroad for a time owing to his tangled love affair, was only too willing to undertake a mission which would relieve the tedium of a sojourn in a foreign country.

Thus it came about that, in November, 1788, Blakeney found himself once again in Paris—a city which he had not revisited since his boyhood days. He was received at the British Embassy with open arms, and Her Excellency, who had known Percy's father in the past, welcomed the son of her old friend and insisted on keeping him at the Embassy as a guest until he should find an apartment for himself. Soon his tall powerful figure

and exquisite clothes were as well known on the Place Louis XV as they were in the Mall.

"Le dandy Anglais," with his inane laugh, his brilliant repartee, became the talk of Parisian society, and his name was on the tongues of most of the aristocratic and fashionable people. Indeed, his life in Paris hardly differed from his life in London. At the same time, judging from the letters and reports which he sent regularly to Pitt, there is no doubt that under the guise of a young exquisite about town, he devoted his brain and energy to the study of the political situation as it was fast developing in France. It was also during this time that he gleaned all that intimate knowledge of men, of places, and of things which stood him in such good stead later on.

"Dear William," he wrote on January 20th, 1789, "I suppose that my official reports to you should have been dotted about with abstruse comments which for you would have been difficult of understanding, and for everyone else entirely unintelligible. The truth is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain reliable information or coherent accounts of their aspirations and their aims from these so-called revolutionaries and their followers. Tactful questionings elicit references to Rousseau, Diderot and Malesherbes; abstract philosophies dealing with the rights of man. But try to discuss with the leaders the present political situation and they become furtive, evasive and as silent as the grave, as if one had thrown a fireball into their midst.

"However, here are a few facts, the truth of which I can vouch for. During this last month, I have had occasion to meet and become very friendly with the Marquis de St. Cyr and his family. The marquis is one of the real

old type of French aristocrat—feudalistic to the backbone, hard, intolerant, but the perfect courtier. From him I gathered that the King will definitely refuse to sanction the 'Assemblée Générale,' and will attempt to govern with the aid of the army. St. Cyr is in communication with Austria, and he told me that he had negotiated for an Austrian army of 10,000 strong to march upon Paris as soon as any trouble occurs. I imagine that the trouble refers to the possible revolt of the 'Tiers Etat' should they not obtain the constitutional reforms which they demand. I also gather that the King and the *noblesse* (with the exception of a few), look upon the revolutionary party as a clique which will bark a lot, but which will never bite.

"I am hoping to obtain further and more precise information later on, but trust that these few items will prove of interest."

February 10th, 1789.

"DEAR WILLIAM,

Thanks for your letter the contents of which amused me vastly. I always thought H.R.H. was a bit wild and I am not surprised that gossip has linked his name with 'Our Doria.'

"I have passed a highly diverting fortnight. I ran across the Vicomte de Bonnefin last Friday, and, in spite of the wound which I inflicted upon him nearly twenty years ago, he was exceedingly friendly and bore me no grudge. Through him, I gained access to the salon of Mademoiselle Lucille Phillipon, a triumph, my dear friend, I can assure you! She is more inaccessible than the Pope and far more exclusive. It appears that this chit of a girl—Lucille is only twenty—has established a salon

more select and more erudite and artistic than any of her rivals. And what is more, in her house it is that the real leaders of the revolutionary party meet to plan and discuss their seditious coups.

"Firstly, there is Maximilian Robespierre. A young lawyer and an engaging youth. He is a fanatic and madly ambitious. He will stick at nothing to gain his ends. His idea is to abolish religion, the law, the state, the monarchy, in fact everything! A simple programme, what? Then there is Louis de St. Just, Robespierre's shadow and second self. Elegant, well dressed, well read, but with no ideas of his own: he merely echoes what Robespierre says. Then there is Armand Chauvelin whom probably you knew when he was in London with Talleyrand. I cannot quite make him out. He is a gentleman and an aristocrat, and has had several diplomatic missions, besides the one in London. He is undeniably clever and shrewd, but he gives me the impression of being entirely unscrupulous and a time-server. I met him at a rout given by the St. Cyrs and again at a reception at the Comte de Tournay's. But I have also seen him hobnobbing with Robespierre and the revolutionary faction. It looks to me like a case of the hare hunting with the hounds. I fancy that he is a dangerous man—a traitor to his caste—a convert to revolutionary ideals and therefore all the more fanatical. There are others of course: look for them in my next letter.

"The joke at the moment, as far as I am concerned, is the opinion which these hot heads have of me. They put me down as a stupid idiot, a dull inane fop, and a complete fool with the result that they air their most outrageous views in my presence thinking me of no account. This is all to the good. It appears that the

Phillipon holds me in utter contempt and of course to these revolutionaries anyone with my name and upbringing is anathema. It is all demmed amusing."

Except for a few brief visits to London and Richmond, Sir Percy Blakeney seems to have spent more than three years in Paris. From his letters to Pitt during that time—the few letters that have been preserved—it can be inferred that while he carried out the mission entrusted to him to the best of his ability, his life ran on normal lines: nothing especial occurred which could not have happened to any other wealthy foreigner who chose to remain in France during those early days of the revolution, and witnessed the commencement of the greatest social upheaval that ever sent a dynasty tottering and nearly annihilated an entire caste. That he was not altogether contented with the work he had in hand and was looking for different and higher activities is shown in his fragmentary diary: for already in 1789, he wrote:

"I am now in my thirtieth year and I have accomplished nothing. Unless there is a war, it looks as if I shall continue to do nothing save idle my life away and spend my money on trifles! Yet I feel deep down in me, that one day opportunity will knock at my door and beckon me to unknown and marvellous adventures."

On March the tenth of that year, the Théâtre des Arts opened the Paris season with a gala performance. A new and reputedly beautiful actress was billed to make her appearance on the dramatic stage and her début was fixed for that night. The King and Queen had promised to be present: and the auditorium was a resplendent

mass of glittering jewellery, exquisite clothes and ornate coiffures. The political turmoil was, for the moment, forgotten, and a stranger, surveying the magnificent scene, could have scarcely credited the fantastic tales that were rife of famine and revolution.

It was on that evening that Sir Percy Blakeney set eyes for the first time on Marguerite St. Just.

2

She had descended upon the capital the previous year with only her beauty, her short experience of the provincial stage, her political convictions and a small parcel of clothes wherewith to conquer Paris. Her aspirations towards success and her ambition urged her to seek out her cousin, Louis de St. Just, who had already become a prominent figure in the world of politics and art. Thanks to his influence, she obtained an engagement at the Théâtre des Arts. From a minor rôle she soon entered stardom, and, by popular acclamation, became leading lady at that fashionable theatre.

Gradually Marguerite St. Just became the idol of fashionable Paris. Actors, authors and producers craved her presence or her influence. It was inevitable, therefore, that she should attract a circle round her more personal and more intimate than that of her acquaintances on the other side of the footlights. To have a *salon* these days was to obey the decree of fashion, and the *salon* of the beautiful young actress soon became one of the most fashionable meeting-grounds for all that was most intellectual in Paris.

Scarcely twenty, lavishly gifted with beauty and endowed with talent, chaperoned only by a young and devoted brother, she had soon gathered round her, in her

charming apartment in the rue Richlieu, a coterie which was as brilliant as it was exclusive—exclusive that is to say from one point of view only, for Marguerite St. Just was from principle and by conviction republican—equality of birth was her motto—inequality of fortune was in her eyes a mere untoward accident. Money and titles might be hereditary, but brains were not. And thus her charming *salon* was reserved for originality and wit, for clever men and talented women, and admission into it was looked upon in the world of intellect—which even in those days and in those troublous times found its pivot in Paris—as the seal to an artistic career.

Clever men, distinguished men and even men of exalted station formed a perpetual and brilliant court round the fascinating young actress of the Théâtre des Arts, and she glided through republican, revolutionary, blood-thirsty Paris like a shining comet with a trail behind her of all that was most talented, most interesting, in intellectual Europe.

It was not only her beauty, her charm and her lively wit which opened to her the doors of society. There was a something—an elusiveness—which seemed like an integral part of her personality; a something which attracted irresistibly both men and women from every class and walk of life—rich man, poor man, aristocrat and plebeian. She seemed to live a life that was aloof, indifferent to the flattery of her admirers, disdaining their offers of friendship, of love and of luxury: but she allowed them to dance attendance upon her and suffered the attentions of all comers with unfailing courtesy and good humour. She never refused entrance to her house to an artist or an intellectual; she showed no personal feelings towards any of her visitors, with the result that many came anxious to probe the depths of this mysteri-

ous personality. Many also strayed away from her orbit after a time, for she was not effusive enough towards the "butterflies" who made a habit of fluttering round any personage of note; she certainly never counted the good-will of those who had only great names or well-filled purses to recommend them. She became a law unto herself and there the matter rested.

So great then was the popularity of Marguerite St. Just that her friendship was coveted by all that was the most fashionable and intellectual in the capital, and invitations to her *salon* were sought after more than any other event in the social world.

To say that she was besieged with proposals of marriage, that her drawing-room was overcrowded with love-sick swains, would not be an exaggeration. These were a tribute to her intelligence and beauty. Adulation and devotion were hers by right, and she might easily have chosen for husband the highest noble in the land or the most famous man in Europe had she so willed. But so far Marguerite had remained untouched and unmoved. No man could lay claim to a more intimate place in her affections than mere friendship gave him. She seemed impervious to the darts of the god of love, resisting his every onslaught with a witty sally or a gracious smile.

3

There was, however, another side to her gay and intellectual *salon*. At the time of her triumphal entry into Paris, there was already talk of coming changes in the constitution, whispers of momentous happenings and of plots against the monarchy. Marguerite and her brother Armand, together with her cousin Louis de St. Just who was Robespierre's intimate friend, were upholders of this

new trend of thought; they were known in the revolutionary clubs as ardent supporters of a republic. Nor was this upholding of revolutionary ideals either a caprice or a pose. Marguerite had had to fight a grim battle with life both for herself and her brother Armand, and, like all people who have had to struggle for existence, she understood the feelings of the down-trodden and sympathised with their sufferings and their wrongs. But something more than mere abstract sympathy contributed in the end to the forming of Marguerite St. Just's outlook upon life.

Her brother, Armand, when little more than a school-boy, fell desperately in love with Angèle, the only daughter of the Marquis de St. Cyr. This sentimental attachment was hopeless at the outset, for the Marquis, full of the pride and arrogant prejudices of his caste, would never have permitted a union between his daughter and a plebeian. One day Armand, the timid and respectful lover, ventured to address a small poem of his own composition to the idol of his dreams. It fell into the hands of her father. The next night the unfortunate young man was waylaid outside Paris by the valets of the Marquis and ignominiously thrashed—thrashed like a dog within an inch of his life—just because he had dared to raise his eyes to the daughter of an aristocrat. This outrage, Marguerite, who idolised her brother, never forgot.

The time came when the Marquis de St. Cyr, like many of his caste, actuated by loyalty to the throne and realising that unless aid came from outside, France as a nation would be powerless to save her monarchy, made overtures to the Austrian Emperor with a view to obtaining his support against the revolution, then in its

infancy. By some means or other that are not quite clear Marguerite St. Just got to know of this. She had a great many friends, kept open house and probably the Marquis was just the victim of a friend's indiscretion. Be that as it may, Marguerite, animated partly by her loyalty to her own cause, and partly moved no doubt by her feeling of hatred and revenge for the insult to her brother, let fall a hint of what she had heard anent the Marquis' participation in what was known as the Austrian plot.

"La patrie en danger," was already the rallying cry of Danton and of those who dominated in the National Assembly, and within twenty-four hours Marguerite's hints had born fruit. The Marquis de St. Cyr was arrested, his papers searched and the treasonable correspondence brought to light. He was arraigned for treason, his wife and two sons were accused of complicity, and all four perished on the guillotine. Angèle alone escaped the fate of her family and found refuge subsequently in England.

No one outside a close circle of intimates, came to hear how the denunciation against the Marquis de St. Cyr had come about. Certainly no one attributed it to the fascinating actress of the rue Richlieu who held all Paris in thrall. So, her *salon* continued to flourish, continued to be the magnet which drew to her all those who considered themselves intellectuals and Marguerite continued to earn the rapturous applause of the theatre-going public.

4

At first no surprise was evinced when the English dandy was not only admitted into the distinguished

coterie presided over by beautiful Marguerite St. Just, but became one of its most frequent associates. Sir Percy Blakeney was seen everywhere, was welcomed wherever he went, what more natural than that like any other star of the social firmament he should presently revolve round its most brilliant planet? But what he found there to entertain him was difficult to guess, for he spoke but little, and never joined in the political debates and friendly arguments which as time went on came more and more often on the *tapis* in the popular actress' *salon*.

As a matter of fact Blakeney, after that evening at the theatre which had witnessed Marguerite St. Just's *début*, had made up his mind to get an introduction to her. He approached several of his friends with this request, but was met with a polite refusal. It was easier, these friends told him, to enter paradise than the *salon* of a lady who only received such persons as were intellectually distinguished; a slight lifting of the eyebrows and a discreet smile would then complete the unequivocal phrase. But Percy Blakeney was nothing if not stubborn. These polite refusals only served to enhance his determination to gain admittance within that charmed circle, wherein, he strongly suspected, he might be able to gather much information that would be useful to his friend Pitt.

It was finally through the good offices of Louis de St. Just, Marguerite's relative, that he obtained the coveted introduction and after that his great bulk, always immaculately dressed, was frequently seen reclining in the beautiful actress's comfortable arm-chairs.

Though his presence seemed certainly out of place in the intellectual atmosphere which reigned in the apartment of the rue Richlieu, he was accepted and made welcome not only by Marguerite herself, but also by her

intimates: and soon the intimate coterie which paid court to "the cleverest woman in Europe" as she was frequently called, was greeted with the spectacle of a foreigner who was quite undistinguished save for his dandyism and exquisite manners, being received on terms of equality by some of the keenest brains in France.

The truth of the matter was that in Sir Percy Blake-ney Marguerite had found a type which was new to her. She had never before come in contact with that species called *le gentleman anglais*, and he interested her. He flattered her æsthetic sense by his perfect manners, his elegant diction and his marvellous knowledge of her country and of her countrymen. Moreover, he was without doubt extremely good to look at, and few women can fail to be thrilled by six foot three inches of handsome male. After a few visits from him she became intrigued in his personality. Through his outward flippancy and his parade of shallow levity, she was clever enough to discern the brilliant mind and the strength of character which lay concealed within. She loved to sharpen her wits against those of her English friend and to taunt him with her republican creed.

"What right have you, Milor," she would say, "to your idleness and luxury? You have never lifted a finger towards winning your wealth or your title."

Sir Percy indignantly protested. "Zounds, madam, you deign to talk as if I wasn't kept busy with social duties all the day: i'faith, I am literally rushed off my feet."

"Yet, sir, you find time to idle in my apartment every afternoon and to attend the theatre every night."

Sir Percy shrugged his broad shoulders. "That, fair lady, is all part of the day's work. I must keep an eye on France's prettiest and most dangerous republican."

And Lalage avers that Marguerite was greatly

troubled by this apt retort, wondering whether there was not some hidden meaning behind the jest or perhaps a warning.¹

5

Then one fine day social Paris was aroused out of its habitual nonchalance: it could hardly believe its eyes when it saw Marguerite St. Just drive out to the Bois in her barouche with Sir Percy Blakeney seated at her side. The intimates were frankly shocked; it was unprecedented; astonishing; almost unbelievable. She had never done such an outrageous thing before. It was preposterous, undignified, impossible.

To the thousand entreaties for an explanation of this amazing departure from precedent, she turned a deaf ear and, what's more, she now took—deliberately, it seemed—to flaunting her new friendship in the face of all who cared to see; even going to the lengths of frequenting the fashionable restaurants and places of entertainment alone with him. That Marguerite St. Just was actually in love was deemed inadmissible; that she could prefer the company of this foreign dandy to that of intellectual Paris was not to be thought of.

Sir Percy, when questioned on his open devotion to the popular actress, gave one of his usual evasive replies.

"Lud, sir," he said, "she's a demmed pretty woman. And I like demmed pretty women."

"But," retorted an English friend of his who had lived in Paris for years and knew all the local gossip, "you won't get anything out of her."

And Blakeney merely turned his lazy blue eyes on his interlocutor so that the latter winced and quickly apolo-

¹ Lalage: *Les grandes actrices du XVIIIème siècle.*

gised for his remark, which certainly was in questionable taste.

Marguerite, on the other hand, sailed serenely on her way. Her actions might appear eccentric in some people's eyes, but it was tacitly admitted that she had a perfect right to do exactly as she pleased in this as in all other matters. So things went on just the same and gradually tongues ceased to wag and gossip was lulled into quiescence. The few who had feared that the affair might become serious, felt relieved.

Now that the episode seemed happily to have blown over, they realised that their fears had been futile since Marguerite St. Just was an ardent adherent of the revolutionary party and both by upbringing and conviction totally opposed to everything that the English aristocrat stood for. She despised wealth and scorned titles. And the Englishman had nothing else but these to recommend him save, perhaps, his fine figure and handsome features. Well, thank goodness, that was now safely settled and life could from now on resume its normal round.

This state of affairs went on for the best part of a year. Sir Percy did not desist from his attentions to the fair Marguerite nor was he made less welcome in her *salon*. The fire still smouldered on.

Then, quite suddenly, Sir Percy Blakeney was seen no more in Paris. He had left secretly without advising a soul of his departure or of his probable whereabouts. Some said that Marguerite St. Just had at last come to her senses, had summarily dismissed him and that he had gone away to nurse a broken heart; others that he had tired of being a clever woman's lap dog. None guessed the truth which was simply that Blakeney had realised that he was irremediably in love with a woman who, he

firmly believed, would never consent to be his wife.

Still smarting under the knock-out blow which Mary de Courcy had inflicted on him, he did not feel that he could venture on a proposal of marriage to this woman, who placed a man's intellectuality above every other gift that he might lay at her feet. The very thought of being accepted by her for the sake of his wealth and position was so abhorrent to his pride, that he deliberately turned his back on what had been for a whole year the happiest time he had ever had in all his life—daily intercourse with one who fulfilled every ideal he had ever conceived, and possessed every virtue he had ever dreamt of in his future wife.

It is recorded that Sir Percy Blakeney went East, journeying to the new colonies and to India; but presumably he gained neither peace nor a measure of contentment for he was back again almost before he was forgotten, his mind made up.

Then came the climax.

6

Some smiled indulgently and called it artistic eccentricity, others looked upon it as a wise provision for the future in view of the many difficulties which were crowding thick and fast in the country just then, others again—and these included the intimate circle—were scandalised and aggrieved more at the lack of her confidence than at the fact itself: whilst to all, the real motive of that climax remained an unexplainable mystery. Certain it is that Marguerite St. Just married Sir Percy Blakeney one fine day, just like that, without any warning to her friends, without a betrothal party or wedding breakfast or other appurtenances of a fashionable wedding.

Sir Percy, himself, was half-dazed by his extreme good

luck. Ever since that first day when he had met her at the theatre he had fallen irretrievably in love with her, even though he was still more or less tongue-tied after the unexpected thunderbolt which had fallen over his head in the shape of his misadventure with Mary de Courcy. As time went on he realised that Marguerite St. Just was the only woman in the world for him and that he had no greater longing or ambition in life than to ask her to be his wife. But he was not to be tricked into declaring himself a second time and be met with yet another rebuff.

So he went away, not with a view to trying to forget, for he knew he could never do that, but in order to ease the pain of unsatisfied yearning, kept alive by daily intercourse with her. But that same unappeased yearning soon brought him back to Paris. The pain of absence was greater than he could bear. Fortunately for his sensitive pride, he had a wonderful faculty for concealing his feelings. He was able, so he thought, to meet Marguerite again without hinting at those emotions which had dragged him back to her chariot wheels. Once more ensconced in her best arm-chair, he was content to bide his time. He allowed himself to be jeered at by her intimates and endured the sallies of his own friends. He waited for the time when his entrance to the apartment of the rue Richlieu would bring a blush to the loved one's cheeks, a half-veiled glance to her eyes. He wanted to be sure—oh, so sure—this time that his love would not be spurned, his ardour killed with ridicule.

And the time came at last. Marguerite had long since noted with that marvellous intuition granted to every daughter of Eve, the silent adoration and the masterful passion of the handsome Englishman. At first, she took it

as mere flattery—all men loved her more or less. But soon it dawned upon her that this man was different to the others—the sincerity, the honesty of his gaze could not be mistaken for mere transient desire. This was real devotion—the magnificent god of love—which she had always worshipped in secret, but had always failed to find.

Then one fine day he spoke those first words of love which are sacred to every man and woman. They touched Marguerite's heart as no other words had ever done.

Enough; she married him and the cleverest woman in Europe had linked her fate to that demmed idiot Blakeney, and not even her most intimate friends could assign to this strange step any other motive than that of eccentricity. Those friends who knew, laughed to scorn the idea that Marguerite St. Just had married him for the sake of the worldly advantages with which he might endow her. There were at least half a dozen men in the cosmopolitan world equally well born, if not as wealthy as Blakeney, and certainly more talented and famous, who would have been only too happy to give Marguerite St. Just any position she might covet.

As for Sir Percy himself, he was universally voted to be totally unqualified for the onerous post which he had taken upon himself. His chief qualification for it seemed to consist in his blind adoration of his young wife, his great wealth, and the high favour in which he stood at the English Court; but many thought that it would have been wiser on his part had he bestowed those worldly advantages on a less brilliant and witty wife.

There were plenty of young women in England of high birth and good looks who would have been quite

willing to help him spend the Blakeney fortune, whilst smiling indulgently at his inanities and his good-humoured foolishness. It was a pity—so many ventured to exclaim—that that silly noodle-pated Mary de Courcy had blabbed and that the rupture had been final. She would have been a more suitable wife, they said, for Blakeney.

7

In the spring of 1792 Sir Percy brought home his beautiful young wife whose fame had already reached England. But no sooner had they made their entry into London society, than the wiseacres began to prophesy that the usual epilogue to a love romance was already on its way. No one pitied Blakeney since his fate was of his own making. Moreover, he got no pity because he seemed to require none—he seemed very proud of his clever wife—and to care little that she took no pains to disguise that good-natured contempt which she evidently felt for him, nor that she amused herself by sharpening her ready wits at his expense. But then, if his matrimonial relations with the fascinating Parisienne had not turned out all that his hopes and dog-like devotion for her had pictured, society could never do more than vaguely guess at it. In his beautiful Richmond house it was soon perceived that he played second fiddle to her with imperturbable good nature: he lavished jewels and luxuries of all kinds upon her which she deigned to accept with inimitable grace, dispensing the hospitality of his superb mansion with the same graciousness with which she had welcomed the intellectual coterie in Paris.

But the wiseacres were right. There was an under-current of unhappiness in the Blakeney *ménage*. And

the reason for this sudden estrangement after only a few months of wedded bliss was pride—damnable, short-sighted, idiotic pride.

The true facts of the case were never made public. In Blakeney's journals and diaries there are only brief references to the episode. But there are sufficient fragments extant to make out the story.

It appears then, that, directly after their marriage and whilst still in Paris, where they stayed for their honeymoon owing to Marguerite's engagements at the Théâtre des Arts, malicious tongues began to wag—tongues which hitherto out of deference to her had kept silent. But, as soon as the marriage had been celebrated, rumours began to fly round the clubs of Paris—rumours which soon reached Sir Percy Blakeney's ears—rumours of a denunciation for high treason which had caused an entire family, men, women and children to be wiped out of existence. And this denunciation was linked with the name of Marguerite St. Just, Lady Blakeney.

These rumours came to Blakeney's ears through friend and foe alike. At first he paid no more heed to them than he would to the buzzing of wasps. But when the gossip persisted and presently took more definite shape, he set his mind to discovering exactly what his wife's part had been in the affair and to ascertaining who had been the chief actors in the drama. The result of his tactful investigations was a series of terrible moral shocks. First there was no doubt but that it was Marguerite who had denounced the victims of the tragic affair; secondly he learned that these victims had been his great friends the St. Cyrs.

As soon as he was in possession of these two indisputable facts he did the only thing possible for a lover and a gentleman. He asked his wife straight out for an

explanation, for he was convinced in his own mind that there was one which would exonerate her in his eyes. But she refused to give him any explanation: insisting in her pride and her consciousness of his love for her that he should believe in her, despite anything he might hear from gossip-mongers. She demanded in fact from her lover and husband a humiliating obedience which he was not prepared to give.

Her standpoint was that this crisis in their life was a test of his love, and, according to her, it had not borne the test. And thus the rift widened to open rupture; neither would forgo either pride or moral principle. Marguerite stood on her rights as the adored wife whose every word and deed must be accepted without question, and he on his code of honour which forbade such abject submission.

Tacitly they agreed that henceforth each would lead his and her own life; outwardly they would remain quite good friends so as not to make public property of their disillusionment, and Marguerite agreed to accompany her husband to London. Paris, now in the full tide of revolution, had become an impossible abode for a beautiful and refined woman, and for a foreigner of the type of Sir Percy Blakeney.

The spring of 1792 then found the Blakeney family installed in their beautiful Richmond home. And here, as in London, gay, fashionable life went on as before. Balls, routs, parties, court receptions—the beautiful Lady Blakeney always exquisitely dressed and wearing magnificent jewels was seen at them all. She was far too clever ever to air her political views on the subject of what went on in her own country, and both at Court and in aristocratic circles it was naturally surmised that so elegant and refined a woman could not possibly belong to any

but what was termed in England, the respectable party.

True that the high-born *émigrés* who had shaken the dust of revolutionary France from their shoes, openly cold-shouldered the ex-actress of the Théâtre des Arts, the cousin of St. Just and friend of all the republican leaders: but Marguerite Blakeney had by this time become so popular in society, and her husband such an avowed friend of the Prince of Wales that the Marquis of this or the Duchess of that did not, out of deference to English society who had so cordially welcomed them, dare to snub her openly.

Of Sir Percy Blakeney himself during this first year following on the tragic dénouement of his love romance, we know really very little: because the life which he led as the most popular man about town, the acknowledged leader of society, the king of dandies and intimate friend of the Royal Family, was only so much sand thrown in the eyes of the world to conceal his feelings and the intolerable pain in his heart.

He never revealed his real, innermost self to anyone, and at no time did he wear more closely the mask of flippancy and somnolent indifference than in the presence of his wife. He saw little of her save in the midst of a crowd. It was easy for a man and a woman of fashion, living in sumptuous style in a vast mansion and constantly surrounded by guests, to avoid intimate intercourse. Marguerite was as reticent as he was; and in England, though she was very popular and beloved by many, she had no friends in the true sense of the word, in whom she could confide.

And so the London season dragged its length along, and Sir Percy and Marguerite continued to wear their masks of polite aloofness and tolerant good humour with an assurance calculated to deceive the most curious. It

is only from scrappy phrases culled in the correspondence of such men as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes or Lord Bathurst, Percy's whilom schoolmates and constant companions, that one does, now and again, get a glimpse of Blakeney's true character.

There are a few anecdotes recorded here and there, and scraps of conversation, which show that already schemes had found their birth in the man's brain which very soon after this came to maturity. They reveal at this early stage a wonderful sympathy for the down-trodden and the friendless, coupled with a total disregard of self; but also a shrewd knowledge of human nature and unerring intuition of motives; as a matter of fact it was that knowledge and that intuition which brought home to him the fact that Marguerite's love for him had only been an illusion.

She had cared for him—yes! in a way!—there had been no mercenary motives in her acceptance of him—artistic eccentricity perhaps and interest in what was to her an unusual personality: physical attraction must also be reckoned with—but love? No! not as he understood it! At the time of their parting, honour for her had not been at stake, as it had been for him; pride in her case had been little more than the vanity of a beautiful woman, accustomed to adulation. And as he watched her at entertainments, operas, Courts, and so on, he never once caught a look in her eyes that told him that she cared, that she suffered, ever so slightly, that she loved him still.

Perhaps it was destiny—the great destiny that lay in wait for him—who decreed that Marguerite's heart should be closed to him until such time as he had started on the sublime work of pity and self-abnegation for which his generous nature had never ceased to crave.

PART TWO

"THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL . . ."

CHAPTER ONE

"A HUNTING WE WILL GO . . ."

I

AND while in England life went on very much as it had done before during the last decade, in France Hell had been let loose.

It is not the purpose of the present chronicler to pass comment on the titanic struggle that was going on over there. Men, and women too, on both sides suffered and died for ideals that in their opinion would make the world purer and finer than it was and there was bitter disillusion for all. Tyranny after the struggle was more rampant than before, and in the meanwhile civilisation came to a standstill, and passions were let loose that had hitherto been held in check either by education or oppressions. When man loses his hold on his own passions he is apt to resemble the brute beast in his lust to kill, for man's idea of vengeance for past wrongs is to destroy the enemy who had made him suffer. So it was in France during those years of anarchy and bloodshed, the shameful record of which no amount of argument or sophistry can erase from the pages of her glorious history.

But all this is beside the question. It is not the rights and wrongs of the great revolutionary movement that pertains to the life story of that very gallant gentleman, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., but rather his own sympathy with the numberless innocent victims of that gigantic cataclysm.

On the whole England—respectable, conservative England—as well as her more liberal and freedom-loving citizens were outraged by the excesses committed in France in the name of Liberty. But on the whole the majority was content to watch and to wait, trusting in the good sense of the King who, in his recent speech from the throne, had declared that England would not depart from her attitude of neutrality. It was not her business to interfere in the internal politics of a sister nation.

There certainly was a fairly large party who clamoured loudly for war against a country who had de-throned and imprisoned her king, but there were no violent outbursts of popular indignation or riots in favour of or against the republican government of France. True Paine, with his book *The Rights of Man*, had created a mild sensation, and a few agitators, probably suborned by the revolutionary clubs of Paris, had tried to sow the seeds of sedition among the workless and the malcontents at home, in consequence of which a handful of hot-heads had invaded the Foreign Office and attempted to assault Lord Castlereagh. But these were in a minority. For the most part, people kept their political opinions to themselves and emulated the King in his desire for non-interference.

On the other hand, since the King and Royal Family were granting liberal aid to refugees from France, those who could afford it showed their sympathy for these *émigrés* by subscribing generously to the various funds opened for their support and benefit.

ney's papers, from letters written at different times and to various friends, from the diaries of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and others, a reconstruction of the founding of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel can be made with a fair amount of accuracy. When the first story of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" was written in 1905, the author had not then the whole of the original documents in her possession. But as interest in this strangely arresting personality grew, letters, old pages of diaries were gradually collected; and at last, for the first time, details of this historic event can be brought to light.

It must not be imagined that the daring plan was the inspiration of a dream whilst asleep in an arm-chair after one of H.R.H.'s luncheon parties; nor that it was the result of a passing fancy, the whim of a moment's casual thought. It was the outcome of several factors which each had an influence on Blakeney's mind.

His hopes for married happiness had been rudely dashed. He was brooding over his disillusion, hardly able to sleep. The canker of disappointment was gnawing at his heart and undoubtedly, had he not been a man of exceptionally strong character, endowed with unlimited moral courage, he would have ended his own life there and then. For a time he tried to allay his heartache by throwing himself into a vortex of pleasure. It was noticed that Blakeney drank a good deal more than was his wont; that he gambled heavily, that he would sit up late, often never going to bed at all.

His intimate friends, such as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, Lord Bathurst and Lord Anthony Dewhurst, would try to persuade him to take up politics again, or, if he was averse to re-starting a career to go in for farming or some other occupation which would help to pass the time

away. But their friendly advice was ignored. He could settle down to nothing useful. And thus the weeks passed and the pain was as acute as ever.

Again and again, during the long hours of mental torment, ever since the terrible revelation of his wife's denunciation of the St. Cyr family and its tragic sequel, he brooded over the fate of those unfortunate men and women who were paying such a heavy price for their former life of ease. Right from the beginning of the Reign of Terror in France, his soul sickened at the thought of the hideous carnage of innocent people with no distinction as to age or sex. Vaguely he wished that he could do something to alleviate their suffering. Exactly what or how, he could not imagine at the time. Nor could he understand why he was burning with the desire to help. He only knew that he did, and this thought, in time, took stronger and stronger root in his brain.

"It is a farcical notion, I admit," he writes to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes at the beginning of June, 1792, "to attempt what must seem an impossible task; namely to come to the rescue of those unfortunate people who are daily suffering torture and death in France. Why I should wish to do this, God alone knows. Perhaps, it comes from a desire for expiation, to avenge the St. Cyrs. Perhaps again, it is a form of revenge: a revenge against the views, the so-called ideals, that brought their martyrdom about. But it is all so mixed up in my mind that I hardly understand it myself; my thoughts are in a tangle. But, oh, my dear Ffoulkes, how I long for an opportunity to escape from the confounded mess which I seem to have woven around myself. . . ."

But the germ of the idea was born when, after a great deal of fruitless thinking, he finally made up his mind to devise some kind of workable plan for the rescue of those who appeared to him most worthy of sympathy. His ideas were vague at first on the subject. There were so many over in France, who were worthy of sympathy—intellectuals, artists, aristocrats, faithful servants—mostly scared to death at the magnitude of the cataclysm that had befallen them, unable to raise a finger to save themselves or those they cared for, and above all wholly destitute by now, without the means of organising, let alone carrying out their escape from the revolutionary inferno.

Blakeney's scheme was to provide a fund for the purpose of forged passports and clothes and paying for the services of those who might be useful in an organised escape. But he soon realised that it would be impossible to distribute the money, for it would have to pass through so many hands, to most of which it would certainly stick long before it reached those for whom it was intended.

His second plan proved equally unworkable. Having paid a surreptitious visit to Paris with the intention of being of service to some of those unfortunates, he hoped that by offering substantial bribes to one or other of the poorly paid, half-starved, officials he could, by appealing to their greed, enlist their aid in his errand of mercy. But though he found no great unwillingness to accept good English gold, most of these men were equally ready to betray him and, through fear of reprisals if discovered, his plans also, or else openly spent the money they had received on themselves and none on the necessary preparations and journeys to the coast. Something more real, more dependable, was obviously needed.

And soon opportunity presented itself and with it the great idea was born.

3

What happened was this: over in Paris, Armand St. Just, Marguerite's young brother, had done a very foolish thing. Sickened by the terrible excesses committed by the Terrorists, his one-time friends, he had recklessly embarked on anti-revolutionary activities. This brought him into bad odour with the leaders of the extreme party and gravely imperilled his life.

His cousin, Louis de St. Just, who played Damon to Robespierre's Pythias, learned of Armand's revulsion of feeling, and delighted to hold the whip-hand over members of his family whom he considered traitors to the cause, dangled before Armand's frightened eyes the unpleasant picture of what exposure would mean to him. For Louis would willingly have sacrificed his own kith and kin on the altar of Liberty so long as that sacrifice redounded to his own credit and popularity.

Armand was helpless. He was not strong enough to take the bull by the horns and dare his cousin to do his worst, even though he knew that Louis had no definite proof of his complicity in the various Royalist plots that were hatched all over the country just then, nor had he sufficient physical courage to make a dash for liberty. He did not at first dare to communicate with his sister in England, or, for that matter, with anybody who might have been able to help him out of his trouble. He just stayed on at his lodgings in Paris, hoping for the best, with a sword of Damocles hanging over his head. And Louis continued to play with him and to taunt him until the poor young man was nearly driven mad with fear.

A fortnight later, about the fifteenth of June of that

year, it appears that Armand, at the end of his tether, summoned up his courage and resolved to make a bid for freedom. He wrote to Marguerite and begged for her aid. This letter never reached its destination for his movements were closely watched and Louis of course made a point of having all his cousin's correspondence intercepted. Thus another weapon in the shape of that compromising letter was held over Armand's head, and this weapon was a highly dangerous one, since it was considered the act of a traitor to seek outside aid in any kind of emergency, or to attempt to leave French soil. The punishment for these crimes was of course death. After this, Armand St. Just was a virtual prisoner in Paris, though he was not actually cast into prison.

But Marguerite had heard from various sources, notably from friends with whom she was still able to keep in touch, that her brother was threatened with arrest. The exact cause for this she was not able to ascertain. At her wit's end how to get him out of France, she turned for help to the inane husband whom she hoped might prove useful at this juncture through the high favour in which he stood with the King and Royal Family, and through his intimacy with Pitt, Castlereagh and other prominent members of the government. She told him of Armand's terrible plight, and the deadly danger he was in, and begged Percy to do what he could to save him. Her entreaties did not fail to arouse her husband's sympathy; and he pledged Marguerite his word that he would bring Armand safely back to England. Twenty-four hours later he crossed over to France armed with all the safe conducts with which Pitt and Castlereagh could ensure his personal safety.

But after the very first interview with the men in power, it became perfectly clear to him that neither

money, nor position, nor credentials counted for anything with the revolutionary government. Bribes were useless, threats no less so. There was no way out of the impasse. But his stay in Paris taught him one thing, the real horror of the existing situation. He became the unwilling spectator of the travesty of justice and the mock trials that went on day after day; he was able to see for himself the difficulty of achieving any success with regard to Armand; he could estimate how meagre were the chances of rescuing any man, woman or child from death once they fell under the ban of the Public Prosecutor. There was no mercy, no compunction to be found in the hearts of those demagogues who had now assumed the reins of government of the new republic of France. All his schemes to aid the innocent and the persecuted seemed foredoomed to failure, and he saw himself reduced to helplessness which was terribly galling to his pride and a blot on his honour, since he had promised Marguerite that he would bring Armand back with him to England. And Sir Percy Blakeney had never before this broken his word.

However, he stayed on in Paris; still hoping against hope. He had seen Armand almost daily but the gates of Paris were so severely guarded these days, that the question of passing through without the necessary papers and passports seemed out of the question. Then one day he received an unexpected visitor in the person of a young girl who came to him with a pitiful story. She was a worker in a lace factory and had heard the other girls gossip about an English gentleman who had arrived in Paris, and who was so wealthy and so powerful that he would be presently returning to England in the company of citizen Armand St. Just. Now, citizen St. Just, as everybody knew, was a traitor, and would surely have

been sent to the guillotine before now, but for the kindly feeling which great men like citizen Danton and citizen Robespierre had for his sister, the great actress of the Théâtre des Arts.

With this story ringing in her ears Anette—this seems to have been her name—had ferreted out the whereabouts of the English gentleman and had come to beg him on her knees, when he did return to England, to take her dear sick mother with him too.

Why did the poor sick mother want to go to England? Why should she be willing to part from her daughter Anette? Why not stay in Paris where persons of her condition in life were not usually looked on askance? Well, Paris was no longer safe for the poor sick mother; she had been for forty years the faithful servant of the Princesse de Lamballe, until the latter's terrible death at the hands of the mob, and surely the English gentleman knew what fate awaited the faithful servants of noble lords and ladies who had incurred the hatred of the revolutionary crowd.

This pitiable tale told to the accompaniment of a flood of tears did naturally stir Blakeney's passionate anger against his own helplessness, more than ever before. But it did more than that; it aroused in him a proud determination to conquer that helplessness and to master the thousand and one difficulties that stood in his way. It is of course impossible to guess what went on in his mind during the next few days, while he pondered over the case of Anette and her mother, or how the idea first struck him to effect their rescue by a clever stratagem.

What he did do, was to begin by giving it out that he was now leaving Paris, and returning to England after having fulfilled the many commissions entrusted to him by Lady Blakeney—dresses, hats, reticules, for Paris,

despite its demagogic tendencies, was still the arbiter of feminine fashion. And three days later the rich English dandy who had come armed with safe-conducts and passports from his own government, left the capital in his magnificent barouche escorted by his own valet and a French postillion hired for the occasion and followed by a wagon piled up with luggage—her ladyship's hats, shoes and hoops—her ladyship who had been the idol of Paris when she was plain Marguerite St. Just of the Théâtre des Arts.

This imposing procession rattled along the cobblestones of Paris to the delight of quidnuncs who were passing by. It halted duly at the Barrière du Trone for the usual formalities, but as the English milor was so well provided with all the necessary papers for himself and his retinue and so lavish with his money, these formalities were gone through with as little delay as possible and the splendid barouche, followed by the wagon containing her ladyship's hats and hoops, was allowed to proceed on its way.

The most zealous and suspicious official on duty had not guessed that the young lad who sat next the driver of the wagon and who formed part of the English milor's retinue, was no lad at all, but just a laceworker named Anette, and that under a pile of boxes containing supposedly her ladyship's new silk dresses, a terrified old woman lay concealed.

4

A week later Blakeney was back in Paris, not with a retinue this time, not in a sumptuous barouche, nor arrayed in magnificent clothes. He came back in the disguise of a hired man in the employ of a market gardener, who brought agricultural produce daily into the city.

Whether Blakeney assumed the disguise as a rough labourer before engaging with this man, or whether he made it worth his while to pass him through the city gates as one of his employees, is not easy to say. In any case it was never so difficult to enter a city during these times of strict regulations as it was to leave it. Certain it is that he was in Paris at the end of July, 1792.

The excitement of planning the rescue of Anette and her mother and the success which attended this plan, drove him to fresh efforts. That these were not always successful can be gathered from one of the most interesting extracts out of his own journal which has most fortunately been preserved. It gives an insight into the workings of that astute brain, working away on schemes for the benefit of the friendless and the oppressed, not allowing itself to be discouraged by failure and determined to find a solution to every difficulty that presented itself. The extract is in fact the key to the man's entire character.

"Failure after failure! In my opinion, the only possible way to avoid further disappointments is to enrol other men with me in this enterprise. So far all the hitches have occurred owing to my inability to be in two places at once and also because it is necessary to have information collected from different sources. For instance, there ought to be somebody at the barricades watching for chances of exit or entrance; somebody must have access in and out of the prisons so as to gather information of the movements of the guards, of the lists of prisoners and of any sudden changes in the disposition of the cells. The importance of these, and a hundred other details, is now made clear to me."

And below are the significant words: "I refuse to be beaten."

One or two successes did now and then encourage him to continue to play a lone hand. Then came a failure or two, where well-laid plans came to nought, either through some blunder on the part of his protégés or some unforeseen difficulty, which might have been overcome if he had had a devoted friend to help him. Then it was that he seriously thought of the possibilities of forming a league amongst his friends to join him in the work of mercy.

The next step was taken from Calais where his beautiful yacht, the *Daydream*, had been lying at anchor in the roads for the past week. From on board the yacht he wrote a brief letter to his greatest friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, a letter which has also luckily been preserved. It is doubly interesting from the fact that apparently Blakeney had before this thrown out a hint or two to Ffoulkes on the subject of his plans.

"July the twenty-seventh, 1792. The Daydream.

"MY DEAR FFOULKES,

You will be surprised when you receive this message from me, but I pray you to follow the directions contained therein should you feel so disposed.

My many failures—Armand alas! is still a virtual prisoner in Paris—have convinced me that I am doomed to failure in most cases, unless a few fearless friends would prove willing to come and give me a hand and sacrifice their leisure to this new and exhilarating sport. Therefore, do I turn in the first instance to you, my dear Ffoulkes, remembering our gay times at Harrow, and, should you be of such a mind, ask you to meet me in Calais at a certain disreputable hostelry called the 'Chat Gris' when I will propound my full plans to you. To this end, I will wait in the roads for the next six days so

as to give this letter time to reach you and you to make your own arrangements. Every day after that at sundown I will visit the 'Chat Gris' in Calais and await you there.

Should you not arrive by the second of next month, I shall take it that you cannot accede to my request. But, should you do so, for God's sake let it be of your own free will and not out of friendship for me!

Yours affectionately,

PERCY BLAKENEY."

An annotation in the margin which is laconic, but descriptive, reads: "Tally Ho!"

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes states afterwards that he received this letter at his lodgings in London on the twenty-ninth; it was brought to him by one of Blakeney's sailors; that immediately on its receipt, he questioned the man and discovered that the captain had made a special journey across the Channel in the *Daydream*, and that she was even then laying in the Dover Roads awaiting the answer; also that Blakeney was staying at an old inn just outside Calais called the "Chat Gris," and that the messenger had his orders to conduct Sir Andrew thither if the latter decided to go. Sir Andrew went! Having chartered a special coach, he and the brave sailor posted the very next day to Dover and boarded the yacht the same evening. With the turn of the tide they set sail, reaching Calais early in the morning of the thirty-first, a day ahead of the scheduled date.

Sir Andrew's memoranda are rather sketchy as to the subsequent proceedings and a great number of pages of Sir Percy's journal are unfortunately missing. That the two met is certain and there is no room for doubt, but that Sir Percy briefly recounted all his adventures to his

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friend, and discussed some of his plans with him, and that the two men subsequently set off for Paris together. After that there are only a few short remarks in the memoranda anent the actual journey and their entrance into Paris, which was evidently easily effected, since Blakeney, relying on his friend, had already supplied him with forged papers and a disguise.

"I looked," Sir Andrew recounts, "the most outrageous ruffian that ever set foot on the streets of Paris. My disguise was that of a coal heaver whilst Percy, having managed to conceal his enormous height, was a refuse carrier. Ye Gods! It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight; no one would have recognised our magnificent and immaculate friend in the dirt and grime that covered him."

It was during this visit that the famous device came to be adopted. Whilst wandering round the ramparts in company with Ffoulkes, Blakeney sketched out a plan for the rescue of an unfortunate ex-jeweller and his family, who had been denounced to the new revolutionary tribunal as being in communication with some *émigrés* in England and whose arrest was imminent. The plan was to get them out of Paris that same evening. Unfortunately some members of the family were at one end of the city and some at another. A general reunion was to take place in some obscure lodgings near the river which Blakeney had hired for the occasion. The trouble was supposing some hitch occurred whereby the existing plans would have to be modified, how to communicate with one another; obviously by a written message, sent by hand, but that message would have to be signed in some particular way, recognisable only to the recipient in case it should be intercepted.

"Blakeney," Ffoulkes tells us, "was running his fingers idly along the wall; suddenly they came in contact with a small flower—red in colour, star-like in shape—a common wild flower known as the Shepherd's weather-glass. He gathered it and idly twiddled it between finger and thumb. Then suddenly he laughed; and gave me a slap on the back that nearly knocked me over. 'Look,' he said, 'this is a wild flower called the Scarlet Pimpernel. I shall affix a drawing of this flower on my message to you. I can hide my identity safely under that device; nobody will guess it. By Jove, I will send one out to my whilom friend Maximilian Robespierre straight away if we succeed to-night.' He was very much taken with the idea. He sat down on a stone and then and there set to work to practise making a drawing of the little flower. It seemed to me to be as good a secret device as could be invented and we decided to adopt it for all our communications. We also agreed that in future Percy himself should be known as the Scarlet Pimpernel. I did point out to him, however, the folly of scattering his new insignia far and wide since the revolutionary spies would soon be on our track. But he only laughed, indicating at the same time his real reason for making free use of it. Firstly, so he explained, it must become widely known so that by its means he could communicate not only with myself, but with all those whom he desired to help. In this he was, of course, right. Secondly, he wished to make an impression on the mob. He told me that our best chance of safety lay in making ourselves feared. To superstitious, half-educated people the mysterious device, sent to one or other of the judges of the new revolutionary tribunal every time an accused escaped the guillotine through our intervention, would act like a powerful charm or a curse, which would reduce

many to a state of fear, especially if any of the rescues could be so contrived as to appear organized by supernatural agency. God, how right he was!"

Sometime during the first week of August, Armand St. Just with two of his friends were safely on board the *Daydream*. Sir Percy had managed to send messages addressed to Merlin de Douai and to Chabronde, two of the newly-elected judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal; one of these messages he slipped into the coat pocket of the sergeant on guard at the barricades at the very instant when the little party were being questioned, their papers investigated and their belongings searched. Sir Andrew was supposed to have given the other to the concierge of the house where Armand had been lodging, but he forgot to do so. That message has fortunately found its way into the bundle of documents already referred to. It ran as follows:

"A Mm. les juges siégeant au Tribunal extraordinaire: J'ai l'honneur de vous faire part du fait que M. Raoul de Bonnefin ainsi que Mademoiselle sa fille ont échappé à vos griffes meurtrières. Tous deux sont en ce moment à moitié chemin entre la France et l'Angleterre." ¹

And on the right-hand bottom corner, a rough drawing in red of the little wayside flower known as the Scarlet Pimpernel.

¹ "To the judges presiding over the Tribunal Extraordinary: I have the honour to inform you that Mr. Raoul de Bonnefin and Mademoiselle, his daughter, have evaded your murderous clutches and are now on their way to England."

5

A day or two later, Sir Percy Blakeney, dressed as usual with that supreme elegance which he affected, stood looking out of a window of Blakeney Manor; a far-away look was in his eyes as they swept over the stretch of velvety green lawn, over the silver ribbon of the Thames, and out to the distant country beyond.

The room in which he stood was of an entirely different character from the other luxurious apartments in the house. Here a severe simplicity reigned in the dark and heavy hangings, the massive oak furniture, one or two maps on the wall; the general aspect of the room in no way recalled the man about town, the lover of race-courses, the dandified leader of fashion, which were the outward representations of Sir Percy Blakeney. Here there was orderly method which suggested important business arrangements; the desk showed neat pigeon-holes filled with papers, docketed and classified.

Above the desk on the wall was the full-length portrait of a woman, magnificently framed, exquisitely painted and signed with the name of Van Loo. It was Sir Percy's mother. On the other side of the desk there hung two large-scale maps, one of the North of France and the other of Paris and its environs. Except for the heavy desk, the hangings, a priceless Oriental carpet and a few chairs, the room was empty of trappings—a bare, neat, orderly room into which only Blakeney's valet, Frank, had admission. This was the room of a capable and energetic man of affairs, not that of an empty-headed nincompoop.

And in this room on that day of August, 1792, there were assembled some ten persons whose names were all

familiar to London society, men whose existence was apparently devoted to pleasure and good cheer, men who were considered as brainless and as foppish as Sir Percy himself, whose intimates they were.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was of course present: the others were Lord Anthony Dewhurst, my Lord Hastings, Lord Bathurst, Lord Stowmarries, Sir Edward Mackenzie, Sir Philip Glynde, young Lord Saint-Denys and Sir Richard Galveston, all of whom had been summoned to this meeting by Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. They stood or sat about obviously in a state of suppressed excitement, wondering what it was all about, some new prank of Blakeney's, of course, some scheme for enlivening the shooting season which was threatening to fall flat. Not one of them had the slightest inkling of what was to come, and when Blakeney turned round to face them they all experienced a kind of shock. Gone was the lazy good humour, the inane idle look had been cast aside like a mask. His languid blue eyes shone straight with a strange light. His elegant figure appeared to be imbued with more than its usual virile strength. And his voice when he did speak had lost its drawling intonation and become firm and trenchant.

He motioned his friends to sit down, and then, in a few clear crisp sentences he gave them an account of the events of the past few weeks. He told them how his sympathies had been aroused by the travesty of justice and wholesale persecution that went on in revolutionary France, and how the determination had gradually taken root in his mind to come to the rescue of countless innocents who were made to suffer along with the really guilty. He told them frankly of the several failures that had attended his efforts in that direction and of his exertions on behalf of Armand St. Just. Indeed, he kept

nothing from these friends whose co-operation he desired to enlist.

Finally, he recounted to them his first really successful effort on behalf of the girl Anette and her sick mother, explaining how this success had spurred him on in his schemes; how these had gradually taken on more definite shape until he found that his range of activities became so wide that he could no longer cope with them single-handed. Then came his determination to enlist the sympathies of those who, like himself, had a horror of injustice and oppression, and whose love of sport would prompt them to join him in this adventure, with all its risks and dangers, and exhilarating incidents. He proceeded to describe some of his methods of working, and outlined the parts which each would have to play should they decide to join him.

They all listened spell-bound; and as the simple tale of single-handed heroism, of failures frankly admitted and of dogged determination was unfolded before them, their enthusiasm broke all bounds. All they wanted was to become partners in this magnificent work, this war against injustice, some like Ffoulkes and Bathurst from sentimental ideals of self-sacrifice, others like Lord Tony and Saint-Denys from sheer love of sport. But with all their enthusiasm which gave itself vent in murmurs and in sighs, they felt the gravity of the situation, the dangers to life and freedom which they were asked to share with their friend.

Then, when the outline of the scheme had become clear to them, Blakeney told them of his idea to form a league, bound together by oath of mutual help and obedience to the chief; a solemn promise never to reveal the activities of the League or any of its projects to any outsider, not even to the King.

Oaths and promises they declared unanimously, would readily be given. Without their realising it these young exquisites were thoroughly sick of their empty existence, thoroughly bored with life; for that reason alone would they have joined with enthusiasm the proposed romantic League of adventurers, under the leadership of this man whose dual personality not one of them had suspected, and who were completely under the spell of this new side to his character.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes made an entry in his diary, recording the fact that all those present signed a sort of agreement, a membership roll of the league, which was to be known as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. They swore that they would trust their chief implicitly in everything. They bound themselves by solemn word of honour to obey without question his every word, to keep his identity secret, and never by sign or word to betray anything whatever that pertained to the aims and activities of the League.

Another extract gives the result of the interview:

"The S.P., Dewhurst and myself are to have first duties. We depart this very evening for France. Our object is to effect the rescue of the de Tournay family. I am wondering now what will happen between Percy and his wife. He told me of the unfortunate St. Cyr incident which had estranged them and I shudder to think of the possible consequences should my lady ever discover the truth."

6

As soon as he found himself alone Blakeney gave a deep drawn sigh of contentment. His cherished ambition

was now reached, the dreams of the last few weeks had materialized; and he had been able to enlist the aid of the most gallant and loyal sportsmen in Europe. For a minute he allowed pride to have its way with him—it was akin to that of the artist in the work which he finds good: his friends had not questioned his leadership; they trusted him; they had unanimously agreed to all his demands on their loyalty, their time, even on their lives. His own existence made up of rich idleness and boredom was at an end. From now on he had an aim, a definite purpose in life, a use for his father's accumulated wealth, other than the mere spending of it on trivialities.

He would not have been the man he was or yet the perfect lover, had not thoughts of Marguerite got inextricably mixed with the hopes and ambitions of the future. Marguerite, his wife! the one being in the world he loved and whom he could not trust! The shadow of St. Cyr was doomed to stand for ever between him and the only happiness for which he craved.

A few hours later Ffoulkes and Dewhurst returned. The shades of evening were rapidly drawing in and it was time to make a start.

"We had ordered a chaise," Sir Andrew records in his diary, "and Percy's swiftest horses were already between the shafts when we invaded his sanctum. There was a curious look about him then, which I could not explain, until, after a moment or two, from a distant part of the Manor, I heard the sound of a woman's voice singing an old French ditty. It was that of Lady Blakeney. Never in my life have I seen such utter grief, such hopelessness in any man's face, and Blakeney's deep-set eyes looked to me like the mirrors of despair. But as

soon as he encountered my glance he pulled himself together, and with a genuine boyish laugh, he threw a travelling cape over his shoulder, took me by the arm, and the three of us sallied forth on the first adventure of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

CHAPTER TWO

"WE SEEK HIM HERE, WE SEEK HIM
THERE . . ."

I

THE details of subsequent events are somewhat more difficult to piece together. Sir Percy Blakeney's diaries are a blank, neither do the few odd scraps from letters that have been preserved give us anything very definite to build upon.

Nor are writings by various members of the League of any help. They were all under oath not to divulge anything connected with the League, and the last thing they would have done, in any case, would be to put pen to paper.

One thing, however, is pretty certain, and that is that even before the terrible holocaust of innocent and defenceless people, known as the Massacre de 2 septembre, took place—an event full of unspeakable horrors, in which the League of the Pimperl performed more than one heroic act of rescue—the rumour had got about Paris that a band of English spies were carrying on anti-revolutionary activities in the city. These activities, it was said, took the form of helping certain traitors who had conspired against the State to escape just punishment; and these escapes were often carried out in a manner verging on the miraculous.

Passports bearing forged signatures were constantly presented at the gates of the city, deceiving some of the

most astute officers in command. Some of these officers had been arraigned for treason, for slackness in the service of the State; more than one had been condemned to death, but all to no avail, escapes by condemned prisoners or persons under suspicion were becoming more and more frequent as time went on. Sometimes it would be an entire family of aristocrats, at others a few wretched nuns who clung to their superstitious beliefs in God—priests, artists, or men and women of the servant class. The English spies did not seem to select their accomplices—that is what they were called—more in one class than in another.

And soon these rumours grew to extravagance. The English spies, it was said, were seemingly under the leadership of one who was possessed of supernatural powers. His audacity was fabulous. Strange stories were told how he and a band of traitors whom he had rescued from prison had suddenly become invisible when they reached the gates of the city, and were thus able to get clean away through the intervention of the devil. As a matter of fact no one had seen those mysterious Englishmen. No one knew who they were. As for their leader, he was never spoken of except with a shudder. Was he tall? Was he short? No one could tell. Was he dark, fair, black, white, red-haired? No one knew. The spies were in the city one day and had vanished the next. They slipped in and out of Paris, unseen and unharmed. It was even said that should one of them be trapped, his identity would still remain unknown; and that there would be ten, nay, a hundred more of them, ready to take their unfortunate comrade's place! All of which was utterly incomprehensible to the bulk of the people.

Citizen Fouquier-Tinville—the newly-appointed Pub-

lic Prosecutor—would in the course of the day receive a scrap of paper from some mysterious source, sometimes he would find it in the pocket of his coat or among the official documents on his desk; or, again, someone in the crowd would thrust the paper into his hand and immediately be lost to view. And the paper always bore the same inscription, with the same dreaded message: a brief note to the effect that such and such a traitor recently arrested, or even condemned to death, was on his way to England; and it was always signed in the same way, with a device drawn in red—a little star-shaped flower called, in French, *le mouroon rouge*.

The guard at the gates had been doubled; the soldiers in charge had been threatened with death; rewards had been offered for the capture of the mysterious Englishman, dead or alive; vigilance committees composed of the most reliable and patriotic republicans in the land, were set up to watch and to make reports. All in vain; the escapes continued unchecked.

2

And presently these rumours, which at first had only circulated among the general public, reached the ears of some of the more prominent members of the National Assembly and thence those of members of the Government. Paris was growling and demanding an explanation. If something was not done quickly those growls would turn to threats, and those who ruled by terror would find themselves terrorized in their turn.

In the privacy of a room in the Palais de Justice—and here we come to facts recorded in the official sheets of the period—Fouquier-Tinville faced a turbulent assem-

bly. Questions were hurled at him, fists brandished in his face, curses and insults spat at him. What was to be done? How to unearth this nest of English hornets and extract their sting? That was the problem. And a difficult problem it would be to solve. How? When? Where? An answer to these seemed impossible. The spies were here, there and everywhere. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. They were in the Conciergerie, they were on the Place de la Revolution, on the Carrousel, they were at the city gates. And no one knew whom to look for, whom to watch! .

Then it was that inspiration came to Maximilian Robespierre, one of the most astute brains in the National Assembly. Here in Paris, he argued, it was obvious that the authorities were impotent; they had no means of finding out anything about English spies. The only chance of discovering their identity lay not in France, but in England. Robespierre enlarged on this thesis and the others agreed with him. It was put to the vote and decided that a trustworthy patriot be sent to London, there to get in touch with every grade of society, and to ascertain how much was known over there of the identity and activities of this league of spies.

The account of these official proceedings in the Government sheets is not very detailed, but it seems that presently the name of one Armand Chauvelin came on the *tapis*. He was a man who, by origin, belonged to the old regime. He had at one time been ambassador to the English Court, but was now a good patriot and, what was very important, he spoke that vile English language like a native. Surely, in England, where they were so fond of bragging about their heroes and sportsmen, people would be heard to talk about that famous Scarlet Pimpernel; why not send Citizen Chauvelin, as a kind of

unofficial representative of the Republic to England? He would certainly overhear words which would enable him to identify some of those mysterious spies.

Fouquier-Tinville supported the plan and talked persuasively and at great length. The scheme sounded feasible. His colleagues agreed to it and applauded him enthusiastically. By all means invest Chauvelin with diplomatic powers: create him an "accredited agent" to the English Government. Then leave the rest to him. Thank goodness that little affair was now safely settled and shelved. All they had to do now was to possess their souls in patience and await events.

Meanwhile, the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel continued its activities, and two days after citizen Chauvelin travelled to England, the Comtesse de Tournay and her daughter Suzanne, for whom a *mandat d'amener* had been issued, mysteriously vanished from their château where they had been virtual prisoners.

As was only to be expected, the rumours concerning the mysterious Englishman which had roused Paris to feverish excitement had reached this side of the Channel. Received at first with scepticism, then with curiosity, they were presently hailed with enthusiasm; the exploits of the gallant unknown became the sole topic of conversation at fashionable receptions: they were discussed in every club in town from the highest and most exclusive to the humble labourers' unions. Everybody's heart went out to the intrepid, lion-hearted leader and to the reckless little band of heroes who daily risked their lives in the cause of humanity.

There was something, too, in the simplicity of the device—a common little English wayside flower—that caught the fancy of the sport-loving populace. The anonymity, the gallantry, the danger of it all, appealed

to the senses as well as to the heart. Soon the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel was on everybody's lips. Bets were made as to his identity. Tailors and cooks named their creations after him: brooches made of rubies and diamonds in the shape of the scarlet flower were sold by their hundreds. But, save to a few intimates, the hero's identity was never known and never would have been, perhaps, if certain family archives, buried away in musty old chests, but the authenticity of which cannot be called into question, had not brought the true facts to light.

CHAPTER THREE

"TALLY HO!"

I

EARLY in September Armand Chauvelin arrived in London, on the mission entrusted to him by the revolutionary Government. As that mission was ostensibly a diplomatic one it was not difficult for him to gain admittance into fashionable society; and though he was cold-shouldered by the more exclusive sets, his position as accredited agent of a government with which England was not at war, opened for him the doors of official circles.

In Paris he had, of course, known Marguerite St. Just intimately; he had been one of the most assiduous frequenters of her *salon*. It was to her that he turned, in the first instance, for introductions to the *milieu* which, but for her, would have been rigorously closed against him. England had not yet declared war against the revolutionary Government of France. She was still maintaining a rigid neutrality, but that was no reason why the representative of "a band of assassins," as that government was euphoniously called, should be made welcome in London.

But to Marguerite Blakeney he was really welcome. In spite of her social successes, she was lonely. Deprived of her husband's love, looked on askance by her own compatriots whose political views were opposed to her own, she turned with a pathetic sense of comfort to this

man who had been her friend in the happy care-free days, before she was a great lady, and was still the popular, adulated star of the Théâtre des Arts. She also made Armand Chauvelin welcome because she hoped, by resuming their intimate talks of long ago, to find out exactly what was the trouble about her brother Armand; what had he done? she wanted to know. Of what had he been accused?

But, as Marguerite very soon was made to realise, the happy-go-lucky intercourse of the past had given place in Chauvelin's mind to his great anxiety of the moment. To begin with, he feigned total ignorance on the subject of Armand: was the boy in danger? had he done something foolish? He, Chauvelin, had heard nothing of it.

Where, however, he did grow confidential was on the subject of the mission entrusted to him. He explained its object to her: the discovery of the identity of a band of English spies who were working in France itself against the existing Government. The band was led by an extraordinarily daring adventurer who was known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, a bitter enemy to France, whom Chauvelin had sworn to lay by the heels. Had Marguerite heard of him? She had indeed and, amidst much laughter and wealth of detail, she told her whilom friend of the vogue the mysterious hero had in his own country; race-horses, favourite dogs were named after him: babies born in this year of grace were christened Pimpernel or Pimpernella; fashionable dresses of whatever colour, blue, yellow or green, were named à la Scarlet Pimpernel.

Chauvelin listened to all this bantering talk, after which he reiterated the remark that this so-called hero was the most bitter enemy of France, adding that it was Marguerite St. Just's duty to help him to bring such an enemy to book. But here he met with a flat refusal.

Nothing would induce Marguerite St. Just, Lady Blakeney, to lend a hand in a work of spying.

And with this firm refusal Chauvelin had perforce to be content.

Chance, however, presently favoured him. Armand St. Just was obliged for family reasons, in order to look after certain property held jointly by his sister, to return to France. He only intended to stay there a very little while, but Marguerite's heart was filled with dread and misgiving at the unnecessary risks such a journey entailed with the nameless danger still hanging over his head. However, she could do nothing to dissuade him from going, and she therefore posted with him to Dover to see him off by the packet boat.

But Chauvelin, it seems, got to hear of this and followed them to Dover, with the vague idea in his mind that he might be able to force Marguerite's hand by using her brother as a leverage.

From Blakeney's point of view, Chauvelin's presence in England added a new and very grave difficulty to the League's activities. He knew, of course, that Chauvelin's pose of accredited agent to the English Government was only a blind to hide his real purpose which was, if humanly possible, to unmask the Scarlet Pimpernel and to lure him to France where a carefully baited trap would eventually close on him; after which nothing short of a miracle could save him from the guillotine.

2

It is interesting to gather from scraps in Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' diary that the arrival of Marguerite and her brother at Dover coincided with that of Sir Percy, who had come on shore from his yacht the *Daydream* in the

company of the Comtesse de Tournay and her son the Vicomte, and her daughter Suzanne, whom he had with great ingenuity and good luck succeeded in rescuing from a terrible position which could only have ended in their condemnation and death.

Ffoulkes and Dewhurst were also in attendance on the party.

"Imagine our surprise," Sir Andrew writes in his diary, "when Lady Blakeney sailed into the coffee-room with young St. Just. Percy, too, was obviously taken aback, but soon recovered his marvellous presence of mind. The comtesse and Lady Blakeney had evidently known one another in Paris, but the comtesse's greeting was anything but friendly. There ensued a humorous episode between Percy and the young vicomte. For a few moments my heart was in my mouth as I feared that we had been discovered. How it was that not one of the de Tournay family went so far as to guess that they actually owed their lives to Blakeney I never could understand. Mademoiselle Suzanne, in her charming way, prattled incessantly of the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel and Lady Blakeney listened with obvious delight to her talk. I marvelled if she was on the point of guessing the truth, for the coincidence of this rescue and our presence in Dover must, I thought, have jumped to the eyes. Percy, however, in his usual flippant manner, was ready with some fantastic story which allayed all suspicion and everything passed off without danger."

It was during the halt at the "Fisherman's Rest" that Sir Percy had actual proof that Chauvelin had already approached Marguerite on the subject of his mission. While his guests were resting after their meal he wan-

dered out into the garden and it is practically certain that he overheard a conversation between his wife and the accredited agent. In the course of this conversation Chauvelin used certain threats in connection with Armand St. Just, and for the first time gave Marguerite to understand that he knew quite a good deal about her brother's anti-revolutionary activities. What Marguerite's attitude was in answer to these vague threats it is impossible to say. Chauvelin had not, it seems, at the very moment any proof of what he asserted. But proof did come to his hands very shortly afterwards.

There are different versions as to how this came about. One version is that after Armand's departure from the "Fisherman's Rest" the rest of the party posted to London, only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Tony remaining at the inn, pending further instructions from their chief. Two ruffians in the pay of Chauvelin and acting under his instructions hid themselves under the settles in the coffee-room until the landlord and his staff had all gone to bed. Ffoulkes and Dewhurst remained talking by the fire in the public room, when they were suddenly attacked by the ruffians, their heads were smothered in sackings before they could utter a sound, and finally they were bound with cords and gagged while their pockets were ransacked. In Sir Andrew's pocket was a letter signed by Armand St. Just, which ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR ANDREW,

Having been brought to safety by your gallant and chivalrous leader, I most earnestly desire to repay his kindness by enrolling myself under his banner.

"Though this request may seem a strange one to you, please to remember that my sister is married to an Englishman, your friend, that I have already shown myself

to be anti-revolutionary in my ideas and that my intimacy with the republican leaders might be of great value to your leader.

"Please, therefore, support my candidature with your influence which I know is of great weight with the Scarlet Pimpernel.

"Yours very sincerely,
ARMAND ST. JUST." ¹

The other version has it that it was while posting back to London the following morning that Ffoulkes and Dewhurst were set upon by what appeared to be a gang of highwaymen, a fairly frequent occurrence on the Dover road; the gang, however, in this instance was composed of men in the pay of Chauvelin. There, between Hollingbourne and Maidstone, the two young men were relieved of all their possessions including the St. Just letter. The two young men were finally left in the road, bound and gagged, while the ruffians commandeered their coach. Ffoulkes and Dewhurst were forced to walk the ten miles into Maidstone where they reported the attack to the police.

When Blakeney discovered that his friends had been set upon and robbed, he realised the dangers which threatened him and the League at every turn. He had, of course, no cognisance before this that Armand St. Just had been in communication with Ffoulkes; and when the latter told him about the letter, he was quick enough to guess what Chauvelin's tactics would be in the future; he would use the compromising letter as a leverage to force Marguerite into helping him to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

It is not absolutely certain how Chauvelin came to dis-

¹ *Mémoires d'un Ambassadeur Républicain*. Paris, 1793.

cover that the Scarlet Pimpernel and Sir Percy Blakeney were one and the same person. But discover it he did. Sir Anthony Ffoulkes says that it probably occurred at 1 a.m., during the progress of a ball given by Lord Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, at his London mansion! But even he is not sure what happened, though this version seems quite probable. At all events Blakeney must have noticed that his wife held a lengthy conversation with Chauvelin whilst most of the company were engaged in dancing. He himself was at a loss to explain how Chauvelin had come to discover his identity, for amongst Ffoulkes' papers was found the following letter:

"DEAR ANDREW,

"Our ubiquitous friend has pierced the mask and stumbled upon the truth. Egad, he is the cleverest Frenchman I have ever met in my life. But do not be unduly alarmed. It was fate, and perhaps it is just as well. I shall enjoy myself giving Chauvelin the slip and it adds zest to our adventures which were beginning to get a trifle monotonous. His discomfiture will lead to his downfall and my escape will probably mean his disgrace. I start for Calais to-morrow, to find poor old de Tournay and bring him back here to the bosom of his family. Should any unforeseen event arise during my absence, you know how to communicate with me; same place and time as the last one. Tell the others to be doubly on their guard.

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL."

Sir Percy's personal diary throws a little light upon the subject, though here again the explanation is merely surmise on his part.

"I wonder whether the astute little rat realised that I was following him at Dover and purposely spoke loudly

in order to draw me. If so, my interest in his movements naturally gave me away to him. On the other hand I doubt this very much and cannot believe that he saw me. His loud voice was entirely due to anger at M.'s reluctance to aid him. Again at the ball, no member of the League came near me: I had already arranged for that, and begad, I had drunk enough in Chauvelin's presence to convince him that my noisy slumbers were genuine."

The only thing, however, that does appear certain is that Chauvelin's discovery of the truth occurred that night of the ball.

The following afternoon the Blakeney's held one of their celebrated water parties. Two interesting events occurred during the course of that brilliant gala at which the Prince of Wales was present. It seems pretty certain for one thing that Chauvelin gave Marguerite to understand that he was at last on the track of the Scarlet Pimpernel; the identity of the mysterious personage had been most unexpectedly revealed to him and moreover, he knew for a positive fact that the Scarlet Pimpernel was starting to France this very evening.

"And," Chauvelin added, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "I am following him to Calais, there to effect his arrest and to bring him to justice on a charge of spying."

This conversation which Marguerite had with Chauvelin, coupled with certain things which Suzanne de Tournay told him about the activities of the League and of the Scarlet Pimpernel on behalf of the comte her father put her, Marguerite, on the track of the truth. Suddenly she saw daylight and realised that the enigmatic adventurer was none other than her husband, Sir Percy Blakeney!

There exists a well-authenticated record of an inter-

view which Lady Blakeney had that selfsame evening with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. He speaks of it in his diary:

"Lady Blakeney visited me at my lodgings at a late hour yesterday. I was surprised to see her and could not imagine what had brought her ladyship to my rooms at this hour of the evening. Her first words caused me no undue alarm as I already knew that Chauvelin was on Percy's track. But I received a severe shock when she told me she too knew the truth. She would not tell me how she came to know it, but there the fact remained. She begged for my assistance and I asked how I could serve her. She asked me to accompany her to France whither she would start early the following morning. What else could I do but obey?"

The continuation of Ffoulkes' journal gives a fairly accurate if not very detailed story of their adventures at Calais.

"We landed safely at Calais," he writes, "and made our way to the 'Chat Gris.' There we came face to face with Chauvelin. Before I could raise a finger on Lady Blakeney's behalf he ordered her arrest as a spy in the pay of the British Government, and this, under the pretence that she was, despite her marriage, still a French subject. It was no use in my trying to find Percy and apprise him of the terrible event. Luckily, I met him almost immediately, coming along to the inn. It was wonderful what a hold he kept over himself when I told him the dreadful news. He gave me his instructions with perfect sang-froid. I was to keep out of sight and to make my way to the farm-house, where de Tournay and others

were in hiding. There I was to wait until I heard a certain signal, and then repair with the party straightway to a certain place on the shore which had already been prearranged between us. Percy's idea was that Chauvelin's attention was, for the moment, concentrated on the likely capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel and that I would have no difficulty, given certain elementary precautions, in following these instructions. Having seen the party of fugitives safely stowed away under shelter, I was then to make my way back to the cliffs and there await the usual signal—the cry of the sea-mew thrice repeated.

"All those instructions I obeyed to the letter and spent a couple of hours on those dreary cliffs in an agony of mind, impossible to describe. I wrestled with the fear that I would never see my friend or his wife again. What happened at the 'Chat Gris' I have never learnt; all I know is that after those two hours of agonising anxiety I heard the welcome signal and, guided by the sound, I presently found Blakeney and his lady lying together under the shelter of a boulder. Percy had been severely injured, how, he would not tell me; Lady Blakeney was in tears, but I guessed they were tears of joy, and now and again I caught sight of a twinkle in Blakeney's eyes which told plainly that, despite his injuries, he had derived much amusement from this latest adventure. What he did tell me was that the *Daydream* was already well on her way to England, with the Comte de Tournay and other refugees on board. And that was the end of that adventure, which, in many ways, proved the most exciting of all. After this we shall have to watch our movements carefully, since Chauvelin must be beside himself with rage."

This extract in Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' diary must have

been written the same evening in some out-of-the-way corner of the coast, for at the end he adds:

"In a couple of days we are to be back in England, and then to discuss with my beloved Suzanne the details of our approaching marriage . . ."

3

There was great joy and feasting on board the *Day-dream* that evening; the relief at escaping from the revolutionary inferno was enhanced for the old comte by the happy prospect of reunion with his beloved family. Though a trifle saddened at the thought of losing his only daughter so soon, yet he appeared delighted to think that his future son-in-law was one of that band of heroes who had saved them all from death.

For Sir Percy and Marguerite there was unalloyed happiness at last. The barriers set up against their love by obstinate pride had been broken down; all restraint in one another's presence could in the future be cast aside, and their tongues could give utterance to the love which each had kept secret from the other up to now. As if by magic their estrangement had vanished, vanished more rapidly than the night mists before the morning sun.

Sir Percy that night had told his wife everything; at her sweet insistence he recounted to her every detail of every rescue he had undertaken, so that she might know every phase of his adventures. But though she felt proud and happy in his deeds of heroism, horrible premonitions assailed her of the danger to his precious life, as well as the fear of this new and powerful rival to his affection for her; she dreaded the warring of the two natures in

him, the romantic love for her and the passionate devotion to this mad and dangerous sport.

It is more than likely that she did her best to wean him from the League, but only to realise that this attempt had been a tactical error, and that if she wished to retain her new-found happiness she must be content in the little her husband could give her. Sufficient for the day were the dangers thereof! And there were plenty of those.

That Lady Blakeney had fallen in love with her own husband nobody could fail to see, and in the more frivolous cliques of fashionable London this extraordinary phenomenon was eagerly discussed. Indeed, latterly, and contrary to all precedent, to all usages and customs of society, Marguerite was seldom seen at routs or at the opera without Sir Percy; she accompanied him to the race-courses and had even danced the minuet with him. But it looked a very one-sided affair, for no one could assert that Sir Percy was anything but politely bored and indifferent to his wife's obvious attentions.

His lazy eyes never once lighted up when she entered a ballroom, and many knew for a fact that her ladyship spent many lonely days in her beautiful Richmond home whilst her lord and master absented himself with persistent, if unchivalrous regularity. To all appearances, therefore, Blakeney had not changed from the early days of matrimony, and only his friends understood that now, beneath that selfsame lazy manner, those shy and awkward ways, that half inane and half cynical laugh, there lurked an undercurrent of tender and passionate happiness.

4

A great occasion now detained Blakeney in England: the marriage of his second-in-command, Sir Andrew

Ffoulkes, with Suzanne de Tournay. It was a brilliant function, at which the Prince of Wales was present. We may take it, however, that the accredited agent of the French republican Government was conspicuous by his absence. One wonders what went on in Blakeney's mind when he suddenly found himself thus deprived of his right-hand man; obviously, for the moment, he could not associate Sir Andrew in any of his schemes. One cannot tear a young bridegroom from his bride in order to hurl him into untold perils.

Blakeney, therefore, turned to two other equally devoted intimates, Lord Anthony Dewhurst and Lord Hastings. They were newer than Ffoulkes to the dangerous game, but their enthusiasm and courage were every whit as great, and soon their chief felt that his confidence in them had not been misplaced. Against that, the difficulties encountered in Paris were increasing at every turn. Dewhurst had reported that he had been spied upon in the streets of Paris, and that once, having been recognised in spite of his disguise, he had only escaped arrest by the skin of his teeth.

Again, on another occasion, Hastings had been unable to carry out certain instructions which the Scarlet Pimpernel had given him, as his footsteps had been dogged by a couple of ruffians whom he could not manage to shake off. It was evident that Chauvelin had circulated a description of those members of the League with whom he had come into contact in England. Of their leader he feigned complete ignorance. Hate, at having been thwarted by him, had become his dominant passion, even to the exclusion of patriotism, and he had determined that no one but himself should effect the capture of the enigmatical adventurer.

The revolutionary Government had, however, become

impatient at the delay in capturing the Scarlet Pimpernel, or any of the English spies, and the failure at Calais had turned their impatience to wrath. The heads of the Government felt that Chauvelin had let slip the easy prey, and by way of punishment they had relegated him to a position of obscurity.

At this juncture one comes up against a curious turn of events, which owing to fully authenticated records it is impossible to ignore. The facts are interesting because they show yet another phase of Percy Blakeney's character; they show him up for the first time being as less of an hero, and with all the weakness of a man in love. It seems pretty certain that in his newly-found happiness and in the joy of Marguerite's love, he seemed no longer to care whether the League flourished, whether aristocrats were guillotined, or whether the French Government was still bitterly resentful of Chauvelin's defeat at his hands.

This lapse, which did not last longer than ten days, was so entirely alien to his character and in such direct contradiction to his previous actions, that those men who had so readily sworn allegiance to him were, for the nonce, thrown into a state of confusion and doubt. The leader whom they loved and admired for his magnificent and ready sacrifice of self, had apparently deserted them at the very outset of their glorious adventure; their plans were left in the air without guidance or hope for future activity.

There followed a week of intense depression and disappointment. Though Hastings and Dewhurst did their level best, all felt the lack of the inspiration and leadership of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Nothing seemed to go right. The rescues which had been planned before this terrible lapse occurred narrowly missed being turned to

failure, and, what was far worse, since that touch of genius which Blakeney infused into all their enterprises was lacking, those who took part in them were often in grave danger of being caught.

Some of the members grumbled audibly and it soon became evident that if matters continued in the same unsatisfactory way, the League would disintegrate and finally cease to be. The magnetic personality of Sir Percy Blakeney, which had held them all in a vice of devotion and obedience, having been removed, no one could supersede him with any chance of success.

Their indignation soon took an open turn and the discontent which they had kept bottled up for a whole week, gave itself vent in what was nothing short of rebellion. Though neither Dewhurst nor Hastings would act as spokesman—in fact, they refused to be associated with the discontented elements, either through loyalty to their friend or through some ingrained idea that such a thing was simply not done—yet they secretly sympathised with their grievances and felt Percy's neglect of the League as acutely as the others did. After a debate, during which many bitter words were spoken, they decided, before approaching Blakeney personally, to seek out Ffoulkes in order to ask his advice and help and, if possible, co-operation.

"My dear Ffoulkes," Lord Saint Denys wrote to him, "I am writing to you on a very delicate and difficult subject. Since neither Dewhurst nor Hastings will undertake the task, it has devolved upon me as spokesman for the League. This task is all the more difficult as the subject matter is one that grieves us all mightily, and yet cannot be neglected much longer if we are to continue our activities.

"For the past week we have heard nought from our leader. He seems to have forgotten us and not to care any more whether his League continues to exist or not. It looks almost as if, either through disinclination or sheer idleness (his courage we do not for one instant question), he wishes to renounce its leadership. After all the oaths which we so willingly took at his bidding, this seems to us, to put it bluntly, not playing the game.

"He has been at every ball and dinner party in London whilst we have been almost torn in twain by anxiety and internal dissensions.

"We cannot allow this state of affairs to continue. We, therefore, ask you, though we realise that you are still on leave, so to speak, to give us your valuable assistance and, if possible, to explain the situation to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Saint Denys, on behalf of the League."

"My dear Saint Denys," Ffoulkes answered. "Having been away for the past fortnight, I cannot judge for myself. But, my advice, for what it is worth, is to keep quiet and to make no move in this delicate matter, behaving as if nothing untoward had happened, and I am certain that you will receive the message you are so eagerly expecting from the Scarlet Pimpernel.

"Remember that we promised to obey implicitly. Perhaps this silence is to test your loyalty, and should you fail in the test, our leader would have just cause for offence and anger against you.

"Prudence must dictate your actions in the future, but I pray you not to be in too great a hurry to break away from the oath so solemnly given. For myself, I feel that such an action on your part, as you suggest,

would amount to a betrayal of that self-same oath and that you would no longer deserve to be members of the League.

"I naturally must beg you to disassociate my name from any steps which you may judge fit to take. I do not wonder that Tony and Hastings refuse to commit themselves.

"Think it over carefully before acting. Yours sincerely, Ffoulkes."

These two letters are self-revealing and no comment is needed on the obvious sincerity of both parties to this correspondence. They confirm all that is surmised about this affair. Luckily, it went no further, for it was killed by the realisation of Sir Percy to the danger in which his lapse had placed the League.

Explanation on the one side, understanding on the other was quite easy. The seven members understood and never again referred to that awful time of doubt and suspense. Blakeney may have guessed, but did not actually know that there had been any murmurings against him, and they all carefully avoided the subject, half-ashamed now, perhaps, of their own lapse from the high ideals of obedience and loyalty to which they had pledged themselves. It is, in any way, certain that if Percy had at the time had any real knowledge of what his friends' feelings were in the matter, he would have been the first to admit his fault.

The whole incident goes to prove that, after all is said and done, that most gallant gentleman, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., was human, intensely so. Though outwardly he had lived a life in which Marguerite seemed to have no part, he was starved of that love for which his soul

craved. In spite of the excitement and the adventures of the League, he had been unable to banish the yearning from his heart. He had hoped that these adventures would bring oblivion and a healing balm to his wounded pride. But the remedy proved inefficacious, and when at long length the breach was healed and love rediscovered, he lost himself in the maze of happiness which followed. From that moment the rest of the world ceased to exist and the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel was temporarily forgotten.

There came the rude awakening. As a bolt from the blue, one cold October afternoon, 1792, a horseman galloped up the drive of Blakeney Manor as if the devil were at his tail. The horseman was my Lord Stowmarries and he was the bearer of news which awakened the Scarlet Pimpernel with a jerk out of his glorious dreams. Lord Hastings had been arrested by the French authorities and was even now awaiting trial on a charge of spying. This meant that one of the intrepid band was in danger of death, and through that, the very existence of the Scarlet Pimpernel and the League was at stake.

It was no empty oath nor vain boast on Blakeney's part when he swore on his honour that the safety of his followers would always be his primary concern. In a trice, the delights of the moment were forsworn, the charms of a life of ease cast aside. The lover was once more transformed into the man of action. On Marguerite's part, prayers and entreaties were of no avail. She was forced to submit to this separation and to await her husband's return with as much fortitude as she could muster.

"I could not love you, dear, so much, loved I not honour more."

Blakeney set about at once to make a few hasty preparations and arranged to meet Stowmarries and one or two of the others at a posting house on the Dover Road. The task before him would not, he knew, be a light one, since the French Government would be sure to set its most astute spies on his track; but the spirit of adventure was dominant in him once more; the instinct of leadership, of the chase after noble quarry, with a pack of snarling wolves at his heels, had him in its grip. There was a vast difference between the happiness which he had enjoyed in Marguerite's arms and that which awaited him now. Who shall blame him if, after that last parting kiss, full of a passionate sorrow, regret was merged in the equally passionate love of adventure?

Stowmarries, in the meantime, had ridden away, taking with him Blakeney's letters and instructions. He reported the events to his comrades who received the news to the accompaniment of boisterous cheers. All was well with their beloved leader. Excuses for his apparent desertion were quickly found, each outvying the other in their inventiveness; but all were heartily agreed that he was a jolly good fellow and that they would make up for their lack of faith by superhuman exertions when called upon for duty.

Those who had been honoured with a call for this journey drove off with Stowmarries, like a pack of schoolboys off for the holidays, the rest could only nurse a transient resentment that they had not been chosen for the work, hoping that their turn would soon come round again.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THOSE FRENCHIES SEEK HIM EVERYWHERE"

I

PARIS once more! with its perils increased a hundred-fold. Chauvelin, though without authority or position at the moment, still nursed his hatred against the man who had baffled him, and did his best to communicate that hatred to all his influential colleagues; Fouquier-Tinville, the newly appointed public prosecutor, had set his mind on capturing the elusive Englishman. Spies in the pay of the revolutionary Government had been promised rich rewards for their zeal in the matter, and well-paid agitators were told off to inflame the minds of the people so that all and sundry should lend a hand in this chase after human quarry.

Marat was induced to write flaring articles in *L'ami du peuple*, urging his readers to bait any foreigner who ventured inside the gates of Paris, and promising holidays, free pardons, sums of money, anything and everything in fact, to any man or woman who succeeded in laying hands on the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Hastings had been unfortunate. Coincidence, luck, fate, call it what you will, had placed him in an awkward position. After a strenuous day in the Temple prison, disguised as one of the warders, he had come face to face with Chauvelin, whose suspicions were instantly aroused by something familiar in his walk.

The sudden start which Hastings gave, turned the

Frenchman's surmise into certitude. But Chauvelin was far too astute to give any sign of recognition; he passed indifferently by, and Hastings with a sigh of relief thought himself safe. He little guessed that from that moment his every footstep would be dogged, in the hopes that in time the young Englishman would unconsciously lead the spies who were on his track to the hiding-place of his chief. But two or three days went by and the Englishman did nothing of the sort. Tired and impatient Chauvelin gave a hint to the Committee of Public Safety and Hastings was arrested. This was done as an additional lure to bring the Scarlet Pimpernel over to France for the rescue of his comrade.

The trial of the English spy was fixed for a certain day in October. He was to be tried along with a batch of "traitors" who had been known to have trafficked with the enemies of France and brought about a signal defeat of the republican armies on the frontier. In the official "Moniteur," there is an allusion to a disturbance that occurred outside the Palais de Justice when the prisoners were brought out into the open after their condemnation to death. The English spy was among the prisoners, and he seems to have aroused the execration of a group of ruffians, headed by an ugly customer of immense size and powerful fists, who defied the guard, fought their way to the tumbrils and dragged the Englishman and a couple of women out of them.

In the riot and turmoil that ensued there were several broken heads, for staves and knives soon flew about, and the republican guard had their work cut out to re-establish order. When they finally succeeded it was discovered that the Englishman and the two women had vanished nor was there any sign of the ugly customer of immense size and his band of roughs.

At the beginning of 1793, there were over two thousand French *émigrés* in England, of whom more than 70 per cent owed their lives and liberty to the enigmatical hero.

Blakeney was able during the winter of 1792 to 1793, to take a well-earned rest from his activities. It was during these few weeks of peace and quiet that he made certain alterations in the disposition of the League and its headquarters. In spite of physical inaction, the members of the merry band and their leader were busily elaborating schemes for the future renewal of their efforts, more than ever perilous now that England had declared war against France and thus any privileges Englishmen might have enjoyed over there were at once withdrawn. This rendered the task of the League increasingly difficult; no respect would be accorded their persons in the future, and one and all stood in danger of being treated as enemy spies and summarily dealt with according to custom. More accurate staff work would therefore be necessary; the personal safety of the members had need to be specially guarded; their numbers might probably have to be increased.

As a start, Blakeney bought a property on the coast within a few miles of Dover, which had the advantage of possessing a small but effective harbour sufficiently large to allow good anchorage for his yacht; this harbour was also well protected by overhanging cliffs from the view of chance intruders. The actual grounds were of small acreage, well covered with timber and off the beaten track so that they afforded a secure meeting-place, far from inquisitive eyes, where intricate plans and elaborate preparations could be safely concocted. But for

Sir Percy, and needless to say for Marguerite, the cottage afforded an addition to their happiness, since it enabled them to meet there far away from their fashionable friends and in its wooded privacy to enjoy a few blessed hours snatched from the days of terror and of perils which had come to fill their life.

Marguerite had made up her mind that whenever her husband was away in France risking his life in the pestilential prisons of Nantes, or in the streets of Paris where danger of death stalked his every footstep, she would take up her abode in the "Love Nest," so that she could be all the nearer to him and be there, ready to welcome him on his all too few sojourns in England. From here she could also direct and assist any members of the League who might require her help or advice; thus she would be helping in the noble work of the Scarlet Pimpernel and in a measure ease the pain which his frequent and long absences rendered more and more hard to bear.

At a plenary meeting of the League held soon after Ffoulkes had returned from his honeymoon, it was found necessary to increase its numbers. It was agreed that half a dozen young men should be enrolled, bringing the number up to twenty, as originally intended. It was decided that these should be recruited amongst the families and intimate friends of already existing members. Armand St. Just was amongst those selected in spite of universal hesitation on the part of the others. It was not forgotten that he had, not so long ago, been a partisan of the revolutionary faction in France and therefore, some thought, not altogether to be trusted, but in the end Marguerite's pleading and his obvious enthusiasm turned the scale in his favour.

The other five, all of whom had equal claims to membership, were ultimately elected by ballot, Sir Percy hav-

ing the casting vote. The League was then summoned and the new members swore the oath of allegiance to the chief and to the League. Blakeney explained the full purport of the League to them and initiated them into their duties so that they could straightway become active members. He also indicated roughly the methods adopted and the help they would be required to give, demanding of them the sacrifice of their leisure and pleasures, their whole-hearted devotion to the cause and implicit obedience to himself.

(It is interesting to note at this juncture the names of the newly enrolled. It will be seen that amongst the number was one, Michael Barstow of York. It is largely due to the foresight of this member of the League that the truth about the Scarlet Pimpernel was first discovered, and from his notes that the story of Blakeney's whole career came ultimately to be written. This minor member of the League, proud of his association with the gallant leader, handed down to his children the stories of their adventures as far as he himself was concerned in them. Thus, the memory of the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel was kept alive throughout the generations to follow. Shortly after the marriage of the Baroness Orczy to Montagu Barstow, whilst perusing old letters and documents, the original enrolment form was brought to light. This find naturally started the train of thought which led to the discovery of the existence of this romantic personage. Gradually after an intensive search in the archives of two countries, the truth was stumbled upon and the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel with Sir Percy Blakeney was revealed.)

A sidelight on these new influences within the League from the point of view of the elder and more experienced members, can be glimpsed from a letter that Lord

Stowmarries wrote at the time to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes who had returned to his bride at Bath. It will be noted that though the writer carefully avoids any criticism of his leader, yet the letter contains a confidential report together with a warning to the second in command.

"MY DEAR FFOULKES,

The Scarlet Pimpernel has now completed his plans for our future campaigns and though I am fully in agreement with them, I do think that you might drop a hint, should you get a chance, on the subject of the absolute trust which he places in the members of his League once they have pledged their honour to him. For instance, none of us trust Armand St. Just in spite of Lady Blakeney's vigorous defence of him and the S.P. seems to ignore the danger which might threaten should any of us cross St. Just, who is a Frenchman (not his fault perhaps) and therefore too demmed excitable. The others appear all right but we must wait and see how they behave when under fire. Otherwise we are carrying on very comfortably. The new headquarters are a decided improvement and we feel that there, at least, our secrets are secure in the keeping of Lady Blakeney who has become our most ardent and helpful member. She will prove, I am sure, a veritable tower of strength to the League with her quick wits and feminine intuition. I am off to-morrow with Dewhurst (Hastings being left behind in charge of the newcomers for a rest after his unfortunate experience) and young Fanshaw whose first journey to Paris this will be, in order to reconnoitre the land after our long absence and to collect information as to the Committee's intentions. I think that the S.P. wants to come to grips again with that little swine Chauvelin and take revenge for the whipping he got at

Calais when disguised as a Jew last year! There is some talk of Her Majesty Queen Marie Antoinette, but the S.P. looks upon her as an impossible task.

My kindest regards to Lady Ffoulkes; all the League wish you luck but will be glad of your active return to the ranks.

STOWMARRIES."

The answer to this letter is worthy of quotation:

"DEAR STOWMARRIES,

You need not take the S.P.'s action so much to heart. You know how he always trusts his fellowmembers as if they were gilt-edged securities. It is a point of honour with him and no one has as yet let that confidence fail. I pray that no one ever will. I wish you joy of young Fanshaw. I myself was on pins and needles when I had to initiate you and I only hope that he will be such a brick as you were! My duties will be resumed in a fortnight.

FFOULKES."

And lastly a note which was received soon afterwards by every member of the League:

"We all meet at the same place to organise a frontal attack on a large scale. Time 9.30 a.m. owing to tide and weather. Date 15th March. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

3

The League was kept very busy from then on, hardly a respite being granted to its members for the next twelve months. The efficiency of Blakeney's new-formed

plans was proved to the hilt, increasing the usefulness of the League and minimising the risks to such an extent that most of its subsequent activities appeared almost too easy to the younger and more enthusiastic members, too free from danger and hardly deserving to be called adventures. Perfection had crowned all the Scarlet Pimpernel's routine work.

During the greater part of the spring of 1793, Blakey, knowing all there was to know of the political situation in France, continued to insist on the need for extreme caution on the part of his followers. He would not allow any dare-devil escapades or foolhardy ventures, despite the almost miraculous successes and immunity from detection and arrest that they had all enjoyed hitherto. He foresaw a recrudescence of persecution and he feared the storm that was brewing between the different parties then striving for power in France—the Extremists and the Moderates—a storm wherein the vanquished party would inevitably be crushed out of existence. Hence his ever-increasing vigilance over the too zealous and hot-headed members of the League and his careful tuition of the newly enrolled. He made a great point of getting hold of as many passports, forged or genuine, as possible either by means of bribery or sleight of hand. He invented many new disguises and set to work to imprint upon the minds of the populace of Paris, the characteristics of those which he had decided to assume.

From March of that year up to the end of June, Marguerite accompanied her husband to France and remained his constant companion. She had suffered terribly from loneliness in the past and felt that she could not endure these frequent separations any longer. She could not stand the strain of terror by night and sorrow by day

and determined to accompany him whenever possible, without further endangering his life. Womanlike, she felt that she would prefer to die with him than live without him. That endless pleading and passionate insistence were necessary to persuade Sir Percy to allow her within the danger zone must be taken for granted; that she gained her point and obtained her heart's desire is certain from Blakeney's correspondence, and also from the commands issued by him to members of the League.

"Lannoy is safe with Marguerite. I want Tony to remain on duty outside Marat's house. Ffoulkes will stay here and carry on until further orders. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"It is becoming dangerous for Marguerite. Hastings must keep guard for the present until I can make other arrangements. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Do not worry about the marquise. Marguerite has her with her and will look after her. Marguerite insists upon helping us with the Abbot family. She will impersonate Madame Abbot at the empty house until we have got the family away. Tony must act the part of young Abbot, the son, and keep the soldiers there, at all costs, for half an hour; after which we will come and fetch them. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Marguerite, it appears, was fairly safe in the apartment which had been specially rented for her, and though Blakeney was always uneasy about her presence in France, he had to admit her very great usefulness, since so many of the young girls or women whom he

had snatched from death were so overcome with fright that it needed a woman's sympathy and gentle influence to restore some measure of confidence and courage into them before starting on the perilous journey to England. And in spite of the many dangers which stalked their every step, the two of them continued to cull many a happy hour together, hours rendered sweeter in their eyes by the knowledge of their swift evanescence.

Sir Percy Blakeney was wont to declare to his followers that in Marguerite he had one of the most faithful, helpful and heroic members of the League. In truth, since the day when mutual confession had brought about their reunion and cleared their love of all mistrusts, Marguerite had tried to help her husband in all his schemes, giving him the benefit of a woman's view of persons and events. She was a safe repository for the League's secrets; a sure messenger between the Scarlet Pimpernel and the members of the band; a loyal co-operator when necessity arose.

Though never allowed to assist at any of those hair-raising schemes for rescue in the Tribunal of Justice, or at the gates of the city, nevertheless, Sir Percy felt her nearness like a tower of strength, urging him on to deeds of valour and self-sacrifice that have remained unparalleled in the pages of history. Now that the provinces had fallen under the ban of such monsters as Carrière of "Noyades" fame, Dr. Laporte, Hébert and others, the League was kept constantly busy.

At one time rumour had it that sixty people had escaped from Lyons; at another, in Arras, over a hundred were seemingly spirited out of the city; again news was received from Nantes that ten "infamous" traitors had disappeared from the pestilential prison where they had been incarcerated and were awaiting death. As far as

Blakeney was concerned, a return to England was now an impossibility and, but for Marguerite's devotion in staying all this time in Paris, husband and wife would have been virtually kept apart for close on two years.

Marguerite after a time became a rallying point for the often tired and sick members of the League, who were drawn to her as if by a magnet and after spending a few hours in her company sallied forth like giants refreshed with wine. On one or two occasions, the Scarlet Pimpernel did actually use his wife as a decoy to draw government spies away from some unfortunate suspected of treason, but this he only did when danger for her had been reduced to a minimum. But Paris, nevertheless, was a risky place for Marguerite St. Just! Their arch-enemy Chauvelin haunted its streets like a restless ghost, suffering from his defeat and humiliation of the previous year, hoping only for another chance to meet the Scarlet Pimpernel again. And of all the bloodhounds on the trail none was more astute or more tenacious; he alone had met the Scarlet Pimpernel face to face; he alone knew his identity.

But Lady Blakeney refused to desert her husband and his gallant band of followers despite their urgent warnings and deep concern. It was pointed out to her, however, that many intrigues were undermining the power of the revolutionary government, that desperate plots were being hatched against its members; and should these be blown upon, all the ingenuity of the Scarlet Pimpernel and the courage of the League might prove ineffectual to cope with the terrible reprisals which would surely follow in the ensuing turmoil, no life would be safe, and Marguerite's presence in Paris would only add to the difficulties and dangers that beset her heroic husband. Reluctantly, therefore, but with the assurance of

him who loved her more than life that she should return anon and that he would always count on her to come to him if such a necessity arose, she returned to England and to safety.

4

So far, Sir Percy Blakeney had been able to hide successfully his dual personality; this he did partly by means of the mask of the inane fop which he had adopted from the first and which had deceived his most intimate friends, and partly owing to the loyalty of his followers and the oath which he had exacted from them, never to reveal his identity.

Rumour, however, of the League's activities and the heroism of its chief reached England very quickly through the medium of the grateful refugees who owed their lives to the Scarlet Pimpernel. Soon these rumours grew in volume and the doings of the mysterious hero were on the lips of everybody. The ladies sent up daily prayer to the Almighty for his safety; the ministers, men in high position, even the Prince of Wales, were badgered from noon till eve for news of him. But no one knew anything. The Scarlet Pimpernel was as elusive in England as he was in France. But all agreed that he was the most gallant and noble gentleman in England and all were proud to proclaim him as their national hero.

At routs and balls, anyone who could recount his most recent escapade was sure of a flattering and attentive audience. And, strange to say, it so happened that Sir Percy Blakeney whenever he was in town was always the best informed on this absorbing subject and, many, including His Royal Highness himself, declared that the dandy, the *mauvais sujet*, actually knew who the Scarlet Pimpernel was.

Though Marguerite and Suzanne Ffoulkes were in the secret, Sir Percy felt safe from exposure, for he relied on the devotion and love of those two wonderful women even though at times he could almost see the revealing words hovering on their lips. He also did his best to keep the names of the individual members of the League secret but, unfortunately, one or two of them had been stripped of their anonymity.

Indeed, of late, conversation on the topic of the Scarlet Pimpernel had become embarrassing. His name had but to flit as a breath on the perfume-laden atmosphere of a great lady's *salon* and society broke off its flirtations, men forsook the gaming tables, ladies their gossip, even the servants forgot decorum and stole into the room to listen in the background with breathless interest to the latest story of the hero's prowess.

As for the "Terrorists" over in France, not one of them ever penetrated the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Chauvelin was the lone exception and he kept the secret rigorously to himself for its possession ensured his safety. Whatever glory would be attached to the capture of the enigmatical personage should accrue to him and to him alone. The Committee of Public Safety, on the other hand, allowed the report to gain ground that the mysterious Englishman was possessed of supernatural powers, and this it did in order to explain its own incompetence to effect his capture.

Its members wished the illiterate mob to look upon the so-called Scarlet Pimpernel as a supernatural agent of the devil who could appear or vanish at will, who had the strength of a giant and cunning which surpassed that of Satan himself. No wonder that they crossed themselves piously, and, though religion and all its forms and ceremonies had been officially banned, whenever the

name of the Scarlet Pimpernel was whispered there were those who braved denunciation and invoked their patron saint; while even serious-minded men, men who ruled France by terror and threats, had been known to shudder with a strange sense of foreboding when faced with a scrap of paper containing a doggerel verse and signed with a roughly drawn star-shaped little flower.

Wherein lay his extraordinary powers of evasion, his seeming immunity from wary traps and deep-set schemes, those men could not imagine; nor why their constant and determined efforts to rid themselves of that band of English spies always ended in failure and brought them nothing but humiliation and ridicule.

CHAPTER FIVE

"IS HE IN HEAVEN? IS HE IN HELL?"

I

It may be confidently asserted that, from July, 1792 to May, 1794 the Scarlet Pimpernel and his League were continually in France, Sir Percy himself only setting foot in England when his presence there was absolutely necessary. He would then rush up to London, for his policy of secrecy demanded his attendance at regular intervals at various fashionable functions and he refused to renounce those duties in spite of his wife's protests.

Naturally, for her, every hour spent at routs and balls was just as much a loss by its separation as the time spent by him in France. Even the members of the League considered that their leader was apt to push his desire for anonymity too far on occasions, and begged him to take a rest instead of thus always posting up to London in all haste in order to be seen at H.R.H.'s banquet or some other social function. But Blakeney was not to be turned from his ideas, and combined this arduous double life of adventure and social activity with that ease which characterised all his actions; indeed, he appeared to be none the worse in health for it.

Latterly, however, these visits to England became less and less frequent. He hardly ever accompanied his protégés all the way to England, hardly ever, in fact, as far as the coast; he would effect their rescue, conduct them past the city gates and then hand the party

over to one of his lieutenants. He would then return straightway to the city.

And, amazing as it may seem, he only suffered capture twice during the entire period of the League's activity. He attributed this remarkable immunity to the goddess of Chance, who, as he so quaintly put it, had only one hair on her head by which she could be caught and held; and to the fact that he always managed to seize her by that hair as she flew by. The others, if consulted, would have cast their vote in favour of their leader's unsurpassed courage and ingenuity. And they would not have been far wrong.

Blakeney was the possessor of two great assets; a positive genius for disguise and a consummate forethought which left nothing to chance. Each rescue was carefully thought out before it was undertaken and always in accordance with information previously gleaned either by his adherents or through the many spies which he had in his pay. He always had his finger on the pulse of the revolutionary leaders and was thus able to anticipate any arrests that were contemplated and formulate his plans accordingly. The daytime hours, when there was no immediate prospect of adventure, he and his band spent in amassing that fund of knowledge of current events and personalities which so often baffled their pursuers. Before undertaking a task of rescue Blakeney would weigh carefully its chances of success; but he would abandon it if it seemed to him to be doomed to failure.

"The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel never fails," he would say, "because it never attempts the impossible."

Herein lay the secret of this remarkable man's unvarying success; though far be it from the chronicler to belittle the all-important rôle played by his followers,

without whose loyal aid and devotion, his schemes would inevitably have come to nought. But it was Blakeney himself, who, by his knowledge of the Terrorists and by his insight into their excitable temperament, was able to nullify their efforts to capture him and to increase the power he possessed of outwitting the officers of the revolutionary party.

The Scarlet Pimpernel succeeded owing to the simplicity of his plans which, as often as not, took the agents of the revolutionary Government completely by surprise. The final details were left to the last minute as chance or occasion dictated. On the other hand it is certain that the immediate cause of the frustration of any attempt to capture him was his supreme talent for disguise, which was the result of infinite patience and of careful study.

Some of these disguises were the invention of his own fertile imagination; others were obvious necessities demanded by circumstances; but mostly they consisted in the subtle impersonations of actual people favourably known to the revolutionary Government. They were carried out with such consummate skill that the spies sent out to track him could never be certain whether they were in the presence of a true patriot on whom it would have been sacrilege to lay a finger, or in the presence of that mysterious person who went by the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

2

Sir Percy Blakeney first assumed a disguise when he was hunted down by Chauvelin on the cliffs near Calais. Made up to look like a Jew dealer of the poorest class, he outwitted his enemy so completely on that occasion

that, from that moment, he was determined to utilise his talents in that direction.

He never relied on a disguise unless it was clever enough to deceive his own friends. He never wore the same disguise more than twice in the same district, nor did he use it on two consecutive occasions so that the character was never imprinted sufficiently clearly on his enemies to give them the chance of unmasking him. Nor did he assume a personality until he had thoroughly mastered its original, until he knew that he could imitate the exact intonation of the voice, display the same gestures and reproduce the gait and habits of his prototype, often studying his man for days on end and practising the results for nights.

There were two characters which Blakeney enjoyed impersonating more than others: they were citizen Rateau and citizen Lenoir.

In the Cabaret de la Liberté, a low-down haunt in the poorest quarter of Paris, the meeting-place of the scum of the city, probably the filthiest, the most loathsome and pest-infected hole in all Paris, Sir Percy Blakeney, the darling of London Society and the most fastidious of all its exquisites, lived in a top attic in the company of human and other foul rats. He took his meals of sour bread, infected cheese and sour wine in their company, laughing at their obscene jests, watching, waiting, ferreting out their many secrets.

Here one day he chanced upon a tall cadaverous-looking creature, with sunken eyes and broad, hunched-up shoulders which were perpetually shaken by a dry rasping cough that proclaimed the ravages of some mortal disease, left the man trembling as with ague and brought beads of perspiration to the roots of his hair.

A limp impeded his movements. Cupidity shone like a beacon out of his eyes. For three days, Sir Percy studied him attentively. In the privacy of his miserable attic he copied on his face, with the aid of grease paint, the salient features of Citizen Rateau; for three days, too, he practised the hollow tuberculous cough and the dragging walk of the lame man.

Having achieved a satisfactory result, the next step was to be rid of his prototype, a not very difficult task, for the poor mudlark when he heard the gold jingling in the aristo's hand, and the vision of idle luxury was dangled before his eyes, was only too ready to fall in with whatever this heaven-sent creature demanded of him. The decisive moment for Blakeney would come when he would have to confront his unsavoury companions at the Cabaret de la Liberté. But so clever was his impersonation that not one of them ever had a suspicion that he was any other than Citizen Rateau himself.

"I have found a perfect character," he wrote to his band. "Gadzooks, but when I spring it upon you fellows you will have the fright of your young lives. And a cough. . . . Begad, it is a wheeze straight from the coffin. One can hear it a mile away. And please to remember, I am Citizen Rateau, at your service, from now on. And if you should want me, I am always to be found at the Cabaret de la Liberté. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Blakeney used this disguise first when engaged on the rescue of Esther Vincent and her English lover, Jack Kennard. This particular incident was one of the happiest recollections of his amazing career and this for two reasons: firstly, because he always loved the idea of

reuniting two lovers: this was a weak spot in his armour now that his own love story had been made so perfect; and secondly because it was the first Rateau episode, the first time in fact that he made use of that impersonation which he adopted later on in the most desperate adventure of all, when he scored his final triumph by saving his own wife from death.

The plan for the rescue of Esther Vincent was an example of Sir Percy's brilliant organisation. All the characteristic subtlety of his nimble wit was displayed when, in the disguise of the asthmatic Rateau, he overheard at the Cabaret de la Liberté the discussion between a couple of cut-throats of an abominable project to marry the girl to one of them for the sake of her supposed fortune. He egged them on in their project and actually engaged himself to aid those ruffians in their dastardly plot, with the result that not only did he gain their confidence, but did so to such an extent that he was actually left by them in charge of the unfortunate girl, and was thus able to effect her rescue and that of her lover.

A sidelight on this adventure is shown by a short note of instructions sent to Dewhurst on the evening when he had planned the rescue of the lovers.

"You and Galveston must look after that ass Kennard, who may at the last moment spoil our plans. He will, of course, understand nothing, and may become unmanageable in which case I am afraid you must bash him on the head sufficiently to send him to sleep. My cough—the Rateau cough—will be your rallying point. It resounds in the dark. Don't forget to deal with citizen Merri and his crowd of cut-throats. Bring some stout rope with you and a lantern. We shall need both. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

From this adventure it will be noted that Blakeney used the trick of appearing to be working with the mob, of aiding and abetting them in their nefarious schemes, so that he should have a chance of access to the unfortunate victims. He invariably trusted to his powers of disguise and to his own personal magnetism which often forced some of the worst ruffians to listen to him and even to do his bidding. Over and over again these tactics enabled the League to spirit away condemned prisoners from under the very noses of the Terrorists.

The League activities were now apparently causing the revolutionary Government grave anxiety, so much so in fact that a special decree was promulgated whereby traitors belonging to the same family or classed in the same category of crime, should be tried separately so as to frustrate the wholesale evasions which were beginning to undermine the authority of the Committee of Public Safety. This decree as a matter of fact decreased temporarily the League's efficiency, for Blakeney's favourite plan had been chiefly aimed at saving whole batches of prisoners who happened to belong to one family, to unite lovers whenever possible, to see to it that no mother was separated from her son, or husband from his wife.

To combat this new difficulty he found his impersonations invaluable. He knew just how best to gain the confidence of a crowd of ruffians, men and women of the type that frequented the sittings of the Revolutionary Tribunal, how to dominate them and instil his own ideas into them. He would know how to arouse their ire against an entire family that was awaiting trial and incite them into demanding immediate justice for the lot. He was pastmaster in the art of creating uproars inside the Palais de Justice during the course of a sitting, and

many an unfortunate owed his or her life to the confusion attendant on one of his inflammatory harangues.

Citizen Rateau was a personage admirably suited for this work. He soon became known to the habitués of the Cabaret de la Liberté as a marvellous patriot, a good fellow—ready to help in any scheme that shirked the light of day. He earned for himself a name as a firm and militant upholder of the Revolution, and one whom despite his feeble health it was unwise to cross. He not only deceived the rabble, but also some of the most astute brains in the secret service of the revolutionary Government. For this reason Blakeney always looked upon this impersonation as one of his very best efforts and frequently referred to Citizen Rateau when recording some of the League's exploits.

"Rateau is a gem of a disguise," he writes in his journal just after the Kennard affair. "I hope that I shall be able to keep him alive for some time to come. I find that he is absolutely invaluable for a hunt after information. I must be careful not to expose him to danger so that he may continue his exceedingly useful lease of life. The Cabaret de la Liberté is a splendid retreat and the worthy landlord a safe go-between for my messages."

3

The other character was Lenoir. The real Lenoir was a giant of a man, a coal-heaver by trade, who lived in a small village a few kilometres from Calais. Many a time had Blakeney watched him shovelling coal from a ship in port into the carts and had been struck by the uncanny resemblance between this man and himself. Oddly enough, through the thin film of coal dust on the lids,

blue eyes looked out into the world, and Lenoir's height was within a centimetre of Sir Percy's own. Paris to Calais in these days was a far cry, and it was not likely that the Committee in Paris would have heard of a humble coal-heaver in Calais. An important point also was the question of accent, for though Blakeney spoke French with an astonishing fluency, he retained just a faint trace of English intonation, but, in Paris, the patois of a man from Calais would almost sound like a foreign language.

Having procured a blank identity paper, he filled it in with the name and description of the man. He then set to work to imitate as closely as possible the gait and gestures of the coal-heaver and to copy his most salient characteristics. Satisfied that he had succeeded in this, he ventured into Paris under the guise of Lenoir. Many poor workmen from the country were wont to drift to Paris these days in search of employment, and identity papers apparently in order, the coal-heaver from Calais passed through the city gates without any difficulty.

This impersonation the Scarlet Pimpernel used most effectively on more than one occasion, both for the purpose of collecting information and for passing at will in and out of Paris. Sir Percy's commands to members of the League give us a good idea of the manner in which he used this Lenoir disguise.

"Be on the watch for a coal-heaver named Lenoir. At two-thirty he will be in the Palais de Justice where we shall all be needed. Lenoir is your humble servant the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"I shall require eight of you to be at the Conciergerie at ten to-night. The Committee have decided to trans-

fer a dozen prisoners from there to the Abbaye. We should be able to accomplish their rescue during the journey. I shall use the Lenoir disguise. You will dress as Republican soldiers: I happen to know that extra guards have been drafted to the prison. Stowmarries had better take charge as your officer as he speaks the best French. All you have to do is to accompany the prisoners until I give the sea-mew call. Then fall upon the guard. We will then act as best we can. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

An extract from Ffoulkes' journal completes the picture:

"Percy is great as Lenoir: his impersonation of the coal-heaver is, in my opinion, far finer than that of Rateau. It is astonishing to see a mob of ragamuffins listening to him while he harangues them in words which have a certain meaning for us and help us to pull off a rescue. He had been a member of one of the workmen's clubs—a club the membership of which seems to me to consist for the most part of the lowest scum of the city. The way in which he moves freely in their company and is accepted as one of them is truly amazing. Never yet have I seen him betray himself by word or action: they all trust him. Lenoir has gained an ascendancy over the members of the Club and he can make them do just what he likes, and, moreover, he provides an excellent rallying point; when we are scattered about in a crowd, he is so easily recognisable that we can effect a rapid concentration round him as soon as he gives us the signal. This is to us an advantage as we found the Rateau cough difficult to trace in a crowd."

4

The Law of the Suspect having been promulgated, a new hitch occurred to stop the work of mercy and a new danger was added to its accomplishment. Firstly, since every denunciation in future was to be anonymous, it would be impossible to foresee whence it would be likely to come. Entirely innocent people might be in comparative safety one minute and be arraigned before the tribunal the next. The whole thing now became a matter of speculation as to who the future victim might be and who the enemy most likely to denounce them. Obviously the League's tactics would have to be altered to suit these new conditions.

The element of pure chance, it was true, remained their ablest ally and since the passing of the Law had to be relied on more than ever; but risks and dangers had become greater too. Chance would have to be reinforced with cunning. In order to meet these altered conditions, Blakeney assumed a new personality with the object of forestalling as far as possible the anonymous denunciations.

At the angle of the Quai des Augustins with the rue Dauphine, immediately facing the Pont Neuf, a Public Letter Writer was seen one day to instal his booth. He was a funny old scarecrow, more like a great gaunt bird than a human being. He wore spectacles on his nose and a long very sparse and very lanky fringe of beard fell from his cheeks and chin and down to his chest. He was wrapped from head to foot in a caped coat which had once been green in colour, but was now of many hues with age. He wore this coat buttoned down the front, like a dressing-gown, and below the hem there peeped out a pair of very large feet encased in boots

which had never been a pair. He sat upon a rickety, straw-bottomed chair under an improvised awning which was made up of four poles and a bit of sacking. He had a table in front of him—a table propped up by a bundle of newspapers since none of the four legs was completely whole. On the table he had a neckless bottle filled with ink, a few sheets of paper and a couple of quill pens. He was wont to arrive about ten o'clock in the morning and generally left at five or so in the evening. For five sous he would write a love-letter, or indite a business correspondence. He was a placid, silent old man, with nothing reactionary or anti-revolutionary about him, and the general verdict on him was that he could always be trusted to keep a secret.

But, somehow or other, amongst a privileged few, the rumour got about that the old scarecrow knew something of the whereabouts of the English milor—of him who was called the Scarlet Pimpernel!

Sir Percy Blakeney was justifiably satisfied with this disguise, for it enabled him to hear much gossip that was very useful whilst many a frightened secret was whispered into his ear. More than once he was asked by some ruffian eager for blood money to write out a denunciation; sometimes he was accosted by a poor girl whose parents or lover had been arrested; at others he would glean scraps of information which would put him on the track of some unfortunate victim. It was while he plied this trade that he learned about Agnes de Lucinnes and Arnould Fabrice; in this way too, he found out about Chauvelin's dastardly plot to send Fernand Malzieu to the guillotine.

Blakeney wrote a round robin to the members of the League concerning this new impersonation. It runs thus:

"Whenever you may require my presence or my help, or wish to have a word with me, come to the Quai des Augustins. There near the corner of the street you will see most mornings a Public Letter Writer named Lepine. Ask him to indite some letter for you and then convey your information. I am Lepine. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

An interesting fragment was found amongst Sir Percy's papers—a faded piece of paper signed with the name Madeleine. This pathetic letter turned out to be one which Blakeney wrote at the dictation of a poor girl at the time when he was acting the part of Public Letter Writer. It is a noteworthy document since from it the authenticity of this disguise is established, and it also fixes definitely the date of the rescue of Agnes de Lucinnes.

"PARIS, le 3 *mars*, 1793.

"Ma très chère Agnes. Ce bon Lepine écrit cette lettre pour moi. Tu m'excuseras mais je n'ai jamais appris à écrire, tu le sais bien. Chérie prends bien garde. J'ai tellement peur qu'Arnould soit en danger. Il y a, à Paris, en ce moment, celui qu'on appelle le 'Mouron Rouge.' Il faut que tu tâches de trouver ce milor anglais. Il te sauvera ainsi qu' Arnould. Je n'ose pas dire davantage. Aies courage et tout finira heureusement. Ton amie sincère,

MADELEINE."

There is a postscript to this letter, added by Blakeney.

"Le mouron rouge s'occupe d'Arnould. Vous aurez bientôt de ses nouvelles."

Another instance of his impersonations of real living people occurred when Marat was murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday. Marat's servant, Paul Molé, was in the next room when the girl stabbed his master. As a matter of fact, Paul Molé at the moment was none other than the Scarlet Pimpernel in disguise. He had made a study of the real Paul Molé until he had become a perfect replica of the man. He had purchased for a consideration Molé's identity papers, and induced Marat's housekeeper, Jeannette Maréchal, to introduce him into the household. He soon gained the confidence of his employer.

"I am in Marat's house, disguised as his servant, Paul Molé. Follow me to-morrow and keep a constant watch on the house which you see me enter. Let Stowmarries, Wallescourt and Galveston take it in turns to keep vigil. You yourself return and keep watch on Marat's house until you hear from me again. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

It appears that on this occasion he was trying to come to the bottom of a particularly brutal conspiracy. A girl, Marguerite Lannoy by name, had sought him out and begged him to find her son for her. The boy had been kidnapped from his home some months previously. It was a poignant story that the girl unfolded; she had been Marat's mistress in the days when he had been an unknown and struggling lawyer. After the outbreak of the revolution Marat had gained for himself a position of some importance in the eyes of its leaders and the paper which he edited, *L'Ami du Peuple*, became the mouthpiece of all those who considered themselves most advanced in their views and pursued a policy of no compromise.

To revenge himself upon his former mistress for some imagined wrong, he had her boy kidnapped and hidden away. Marat refused to disclose the child's hiding-place to the distracted mother and caused the wretched woman to be kicked out of his lodgings when she came to plead with him.

"I am on the track of the Lannoy boy," Blakeney writes to his followers, "Marat's ring is the crux of the situation and also the open sesame. The child is with the Lerridans, owners of a brothel in the Chemin des Pantins and they will give access to the child only to the wearer of this ring. I must gain possession of it somehow or other. Tell Dewhurst to be outside Marat's house at eleven o'clock to-night. He had better dress as an honest patriot. I shall want his help inside later on. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Then followed the murder of Marat. The false Paul Molé had helped his master to undress and had put him into the bath. He left the house for a few moments to talk to Dewhurst. During his absence Charlotte Corday found her way into the apartment, and when Blakeney returned Marat was dead and the house invaded by an excited crowd. In the general confusion, he contrived to get the ring off the dead man's finger and to pass it on to Dewhurst. Among the crowd who thronged the squalid apartment was the real Paul Molé, and when Chauvelin came on the scene a real comedy of errors ensued, for Chauvelin found himself confronted now with a man whom he recognised as the Scarlet Pimpernel, only to find himself at grips with the real Paul Molé. In the bustle which followed Chauvelin's cry for help, the

elusive adventurer quietly slipped away while the wretched Molé was incarcerated in the Abbaye prison.

"They have now guessed that we are after the child. The Lerridans have been visited by Chauvelin who thinks that I am safely inside the Abbaye prison. They will never dare to do anything to Molé, but if they do I shall have to look after him later on. Meanwhile here is the plan of action. The Lerridans have asked for a special guard for the night. We will provide it. Ten of you be at my lodgings at the rue St. Anne within half an hour of receiving this, dressed as men of the Sûreté. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

It is easy to conjecture from that letter how the Lannoy child was rescued from a life of shame and misery to which it had been condemned. The real Paul Molé had perforce to be set at liberty; one may be sure that he was richer by the adventure!

5

Many were the disguises assumed by Sir Percy Blakeney. Some of them are duly authenticated either from his own writings or from Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' journal. There has been discovered, however, an even more reliable source, namely the papers of Armand Chauvelin himself. These papers form part of a bundle of manuscript which ultimately were published under the title of *Mémoires d'un ambassadeur républicain*, but the extracts relating to the Scarlet Pimpernel were not included in the published memoirs. They were written in English and obviously Chauvelin did not intend them to be made

public. They relate to various attempts to capture the Scarlet Pimpernel and consist of data which he had laboriously collected as to Blakeney's whereabouts, his various disguises and methods, all neatly tabulated.

"March 25. George Gradlin, a cobbler. He escaped from La Force.

"March 29. I am suspicious of Bertin, a man who has suddenly appeared at the 'Rat Noir.' He seems in-offensive, yet I wonder.

"March 30. Bertin needs watching. I am afraid that it is Blakeney again.

"March 30 (the same evening). I am sure that it is he.

"April 5. I recognised him as the news vendor Jaccard. He is after the Mont-Choisi crowd who were convicted yesterday.

"April 6. Jaccard has disappeared, and so have the Mont-Choisi!

"April 10. The activities of that accursed League surpass all bounds. And their luck seems to be phenomenal. My spies report the presence of one or other of them at Limours, at Nantes and at Lyons. The Scarlet Pimpernel has effectively tricked that fool Laporte. At last the Committee have asked for my aid. We shall see this time.

"April 20. Someone has blundered. My trap has failed to catch the quarry and he eluded my vigilance.

But he managed to rescue the Levasseurs none the less. Mayet is a fool.

"April 30. Blakeney has become brazen. I find that he impersonated Mayet at Limours last week and thus hoodwinked the lot of them. Now he has impersonated my humble self at Nantes and tricked that dolt Carrier."

"*Note.*—He uses these impersonations only in the remote districts where the citizen deputies are unknown to the inhabitants except by name. And he adopts the disguise only when the said man is announced to be in the vicinity. The Pimpernel is clever, but I have a little plan to catch him out this time."

6

Soon Blakeney found that it would be a real necessity for him to have regular headquarters in Paris itself. Lavish bribes judiciously distributed had already secured for him the goodwill of several landlords of unpretentious wayside inns between the capital and the coast, where relays could always be counted on for conveying the League's protégés northwards. Blakeney at this time also turned his attention to Belgium, whither many fugitives had a longing to go, chiefly because several members of the Bourbon Royal Family had already found refuge there. It is to be observed that the Belgian frontier was not quite so difficult to negotiate as the severely guarded northern coast.

One of the League's most favoured rallying points was a small tavern which lay *perdu*, immediately behind

the cemetery of Père Lachaise. The cemetery itself with its alleys of awe-inspiring monuments, a vast city of the dead, overhung by age-old cedars, was one of the most lonely, most shunned spots in Paris.

Members of the League not actually engaged inside the city had their headquarters at the inn whose landlord, disgruntled and wretchedly poor, had been amenable to Blakeney's open purse. From this point of vantage which faced the open country, arrangements could be made for the purveyance of chaise or horses, or for receiving definite orders from the chief. The inn lay outside the city gates. The rallying cry from the leader to his followers was invariably the call of the sea-mew repeated three times at stated intervals.

In addition to this, Sir Percy had rented more than one squalid abode in the poorer quarters of Paris where he could find a resting-place in the intervals of activity. Money, as usual, made those retreats secure from denunciation. There was a woman named Brogart who kept a lodging-house of evil reputation in the rue de l'Ancienne Comédie. She was some kind of relation to the man of the same name, the landlord of the "Chat Gris" at Calais, the scene of one of Blakeney's most thrilling adventures. It was through him that the woman, Brogart, heard of the existence of a fool Englishman who paid lavishly for everything he had, asked no questions and was content with any accommodation however squalid.

Her house became a sure refuge for Blakeney and the members of the League. It was a roof over their heads when they needed one, and a convenient meeting-place. It was in itself so wretched and unclean and was situated in such a poor quarter of the city that it was not troubled very often, if ever, with visitations from the soldiery. Thus it became a storage place for their various dis-

guises; a store-house for provisions; a first resting-place for refugee prisoners who needed courage and a respite before undertaking the journey to the coast.

Another rallying point was at Number 37 rue St. Anne. The ground floor was ostensibly the workshop of a violin-maker, another of Blakeney's most successful impersonations. It backed on another house in the rue Jolivet and Blakeney was able to contrive a means of access from one house to the other with extraordinarily good results. Many a time when, disguised as Lenoir, the coal-heaver, he found himself closely pressed by Government sleuths, he would step into the entrance of the rue Jolivet, effect a quick change and re-emerge in the rue St. Anne as the simple, innocent violin-maker.

In all Sir Percy had rented some ten different lodgings in Paris, each one as filthy and as tumble-down as the other; some of them were so bedraggled that they barely gave protection against the elements, and all of them were so squalid that it is a marvel how a man of such fastidious tastes could ever bring himself to enter them.

The only apartment which had some measure of comfort in it was the one wherein he installed his wife whilst she stayed in Paris. It was a small house, tucked away in a tiny garden on the outskirts of the Bois and remote from the constant turmoil of the city. Marguerite lived alone there for some time, only seeing her husband very occasionally; she kept no servant and did her own marketing, her own cooking and cleaning. She went about as little as she could and dressed in the shabbiest and poorest of clothes. It was to this house that Blakeney would often bring those unfortunates whom he had succeeded in bringing to safety. Marguerite would have wine and food ready for them and she it was who with her own hands administered to their wants. Rarely, too

rarely alas! Blakeney was able to snatch here a few moments of rest and happiness in the company of his wife.

7

About this time it is fairly clear that Marguerite returned to England; the reign of Terror was then at its height in France, and roughly speaking, no one was safe from those anonymous denunciations which brought so many innocents to the guillotine. It is practically impossible to follow Sir Percy and his League through their many adventures during the next two strenuous years. Documents are non-existent, records of any authenticity very few. It is only possible to judge by results, and while 2625 victims perished on the guillotine during those two years, there are authentic records of over that number of refugees in England who owed their lives directly to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

But it is equally certain that during those same strenuous years Sir Percy must have spent a few days in England from time to time. His presence in London was necessary, if for no other reason than the preservation of his anonymity. Marguerite's entreaties must have been a powerful force to bring him now and again to her side. It is not to be supposed that she wished him to give up the League, for that she knew he would never do, but she used all her charms and fascination to lure him to Richmond whenever she could.

He must have listened to her entreaties with a patient ear, but he was never really happy away from his activities in France. He was restive and fretted at his enforced idleness, in spite of her efforts to distract him. He frequented the fashionable routs where his presence was hailed with joy. But though he was as gallant and amus-

ing as ever, he was bored; the taste for society life had been spoilt by the exciting savour of adventure.

There are one or two letters written by Sir Percy to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes which give quite a fair idea of what his feelings were during those periods spent in London. One can feel the longing to be away and up and doing, to revel in the excitement of the chase, with himself as the quarry.

"Dear Ffoulkes," he wrote on one occasion, "God grant you every success and watch over your safety. I am in a constant worry about you all and hope that you manage to keep our suborned crowd in order and that you have a plentiful supply of money. I intend to return to you all within a few days.

"Begad, I shall never be able to return to the old life again. You have no idea how boring London is after the thrills of Paris. Suzanne is beside herself with pride and rage: pride that you are in charge of the League: rage that you are kept away from her side.

"I think that it is about time that you should return to her."

Owing partly to the fact that Bath had lately become more fashionable than ever through the predilection of the Prince of Wales for the famous watering-place, and partly owing to Marguerite's desire to be near Suzanne Ffoulkes whilst their respective husbands were absent in Paris, the Blakeney's took a house there in the Crescent. Thither therefore did Lord Anthony Dewhurst conduct the latest arrivals from France, protégés of the Scarlet Pimpernel, amongst whom there happened to be an old friend of Marguerite's, one of the habitués of the *salon* in the rue Richlieu.

From a chance word dropped by this friend, Sir Percy learned that wild plots were being hatched in the underground cellars where Royalists foregathered, plots to rescue Marie Antoinette from the Conciergerie and of all sorts of mad plans which would inevitably bring ruin and death to the foolhardy plotters.

"My dear Ffoulkes," he wrote on September 10th, 1793, "the de Cluny's tell me that there is a plot on foot to rescue the Queen and the Dauphin. I hear that the instigator is Paul Déroulède. I do hope that this is just a silly rumour, but I require you to make discreet enquiries as to the truth or falsity of this supposed plot. I like Déroulède. He is honest and loyal and as you know was a close friend of Marguerite's. I should hate him to be embroiled in some of these mad schemes. I beg of you, in all haste, to give me as accurate information as you can on the subject. I am already prepared to come to Paris and only await your news to fix the day of departure. Ever yours. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

The urge was upon Sir Percy; no restraining hand was sufficiently powerful to hold him back. Something lay before him which had to be done now, which represented the heavy price that had to be paid for those mad and happy adventures, which were as the breath of life to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Marguerite could no longer hold him, her tears and supplications were all in vain; destiny demanded that he should go. He had chosen his path in life, and that choice was now his master. What he had done once, twenty times, a hundred times, that must he do again, all the while that the weak and the innocent called to him from across the seas, all the while that defenceless women

suffered and children were orphaned. The call of honour was louder than that of love.

Marguerite must have suffered terribly at times—at others she was supremely happy—the measure of her life was made up of bitter dregs and sparkling wine. And gradually that enthusiasm which surrounded her husband's personality and dominated his every action, entered, too, into her soul. The impulses of his vitality were so compelling that she allowed herself to be carried away on the tide of his desires: she swallowed her tears and learned to say "Good-bye" when she longed to say "Remain."

When he finally went away on this 15th day of September, neither he nor his devoted wife could guess that the greatest trial of strength and endurance and the most acute crisis in his whole career in revolutionary France, awaited Sir Percy at the hands of his most bitter enemy, citizen Armand Chauvelin.

"September 15. I arrived in Paris at my lodgings at the rue St. Anne yesterday evening. Keep an eye on old Déroulède. I have great hopes of a great game with our old friend Monsieur Chambertin! The Scarlet Pimpernel."

CHAPTER SIX

"THAT DEMMED ELUSIVE PIMPERNEL!"

I

SEPTEMBER, 1793! The Fructidor riots! And the massacre that followed; causing the streets of Paris to run red with blood! The terrible reprisals that followed the escape of Paul Déroulède and Juliette Marny! And, calmly, serenely, towering above them all, laughing inanely, the enigmatic figure of the Scarlet Pimpernel and his devoted wife ensconced in the little home by the Bois!

And as soon as Sir Percy Blakeney had been put *au fait* by Ffoulkes and others of the events which the de Clunys had adumbrated, he realised the need for urgent action if a calamity was to be averted. In a moment the foppish ways, the bored, polished elegance of the man of the world dropped away from him, the spirit of daring was awake, insistent and rampant: the lazy blue eyes were steely, the speech deliberate. Sir Percy had sunk his individuality in that of the Scarlet Pimpernel. And within a few hours, the cadaverous Rateau, the blood-thirsty Lenoir, the humble violin-maker were back at their old haunts, and Lenoir, menacing and brutal, was demanding the death of every aristo and that of Paul Déroulède in particular!

Paul Déroulède was one of the few men of culture and refinement who were popular with the mob. It would be difficult to say why this was, or how it came about that this one man remained immune from denun-

ciations and managed to escape the wholesale massacres which had followed the murder of Marat. The reign of Terror was now at its height. "Let us govern by terror," Danton had said, "so only can we purge the land of traitors. Let terror therefore be the order of the day!"

One woke up in the morning and knew not if one's head would be on one's shoulders in the evening, or whether it would be held up by citizen Samson, the headsman, for the *sans-culottes* of Paris to gape at. But Paul Déroulède was allowed to go on his way unmolested: for citizen Déroulède was not dangerous, so Marat had said; not dangerous to republicanism, to Liberty, to that downward levelling process, the tearing down of old traditions and the annihilation of past pretensions. Nor had he been dangerous to republicanism at one time, any more than Marguerite St. Just had been dangerous, when democracy was still an ideal, and had not yet resorted to butchery. But now: well! Paul Déroulède was up to the neck in a conspiracy to restore the monarchy in France.

"My only friend in revolutionary France is in extreme danger," ran a scribbled note which Marguerite found slipped under her bedroom door in the morning. "Paul Déroulède is doomed, unless I intervene. You will understand, my beloved, why I must away at this hour without saying good-bye."

Of course Marguerite understood. The call was a clarion one to the man who had never failed a friend. She understood perfectly and would not have wished it otherwise. For she owed her present happiness in no small measure to that gentle, refined and generous man, Paul Déroulède. When she came to Paris, an unknown

artist, full of ambition and enthusiasm, he had been one of the first to recognise her talent and had been one of her most devoted admirers. Though an ardent adherent of the revolutionary party, his tendencies were non-militant, and he had been considered by many to be far too mild in his views to be called a republican. Others, however, respected him because of the spirit of altruism which animated his harangues to the populace, a spirit far different from that which only incited the ignorant to hatred and revenge.

His high ideals, as well as his learning and refinement, had also caused him to be made welcome in the higher circles of the society of pre-revolution days, and to be looked on as a link between the two extremes of thought. Even when the full tide of the Reign of Terror broke over the city, Déroulède was allowed to carry on his profession as advocate at the Paris bar, and in the exercise of his profession it was more than once his duty to plead for aristos arraigned before the revolutionary tribunal—citizen Déroulède, it was tacitly admitted, was not dangerous.

Blakeney had first met Déroulède in Marguerite's *salon* in the rue Richlieu. By one of those strange coincidences in the laws of attraction, the two men, so unlike outwardly, except for their national characteristics, formed a friendship which bridged over the gulf of political antagonism, and they conceived for one another a sincere regard, strengthened by their common affection for Marguerite.

When the revolution first put an end to autocracy Déroulède had been in full agreement with the movement. He gave his adherence to the revolutionary programme, put up for election to the Constituent Assembly, took his seat in that house, and subsequently in the

National Convention, where he gained the admiration of members on both sides by his eloquence and sane progressive views. He never lent his support to measures of tyranny, and at the very outset of the Scarlet Pimpernel's activities he gave to the intrepid adventurer, as well as to the protégés of the League, a full measure of sympathy.

Opinions differ as to whether Déroulède ever guessed that his friend Blakeney had a hand in the many evasions that were taking place among the victims of the Revolutionary Tribunal. He certainly saw a great deal of Sir Percy, who made it a rule, whenever he was in Paris, to visit the one friend he had in the enemy's camp. In Déroulède's house the English exquisite could freely indulge his fastidious tastes in food and wine, in elegant diction and refined surroundings, for Paul's mother who presided over the bachelor establishment, was both, high-born and high-bred, a woman of great culture and refinement.

There is a story concerning the friendship between the two men, which has been fully exploited in fiction. Whether it is absolutely true to fact it is difficult to say. It is certain that some years previously Paul Déroulède, then a young, already distinguished advocate at the bar, had an affair of honour with the young Vicomte de Marny. A duel ensued and the Vicomte was killed in fair fight.

It was said at the time that the young man's sister, Juliette, swore an oath that she would avenge her brother's death, and that, with this object in view, she presently found a pretext for an introduction into the Déroulède household, where she soon became a great favourite with old Madame Déroulède, whilst Paul fell passionately in love with her.

As so often happens in cases like this, where there are only scrappy records of a life so puzzling as that of the Scarlet Pimpernel, there are several versions of what happened subsequently. It seems pretty certain that Juliette Marny's purpose was to spy on the Déroulèdes and to avenge her brother's death by denouncing Paul as a traitor. As a man in love his instinct was to trust the woman to whom he had given his heart. He was undoubtedly indiscreet, and this at the moment when sickened by the excesses of his former friends and by the chaos and misery which their policy had heaped upon France, he had begun to establish communication with the reactionary, or monarchist party. How Blakeney came to know that his friend became more and more deeply involved in plots for the restoration of the monarchy it is difficult to say.

One or two enigmatical entries in his diary almost suggest that Déroulède actually confided in him, and even gave actual support to the League by allowing his house to be used as a refuge for escaped prisoners who were under the protection of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Owing to his peculiar position in the National Convention and his popularity with the mob, his *volte-face* must have been of immense service to the League; the immunity which he enjoyed, even at the hands of the extremists, enabled him to visit the prisons when he chose; and as a leading advocate at the Bar, he had access to the lists of the accused who were awaiting trial. These names, it may be supposed, he passed on to his English friend, with, in many cases, most fortunate results.

No one could possibly have accused Paul Déroulède of trafficking with traitors or with English spies. His munificent gifts to the nation, his devotion to the cause,

were too well known to allow a breath of suspicion to cast a slur upon so fine a patriot.

But it seems that it was this very immunity which finally caused his downfall. His popularity in the National Convention seemed unassailable; his way of life was both so straightforward and so simple that no one could accuse him of aristocratic tendencies. But it was this very freedom to come and go as he chose, unmolested and unquestioned, that decided him in the end to take the fatal step which very nearly brought him to the guillotine. It was due to his friendship with Sir Percy, to his natural honest good sense, and to his sympathy with the unfortunate that he first renounced his revolutionary principles. And now that every eye in Europe was turned towards the Conciergerie, where the unhappy Marie Antoinette was incarcerated, Paul's thoughts naturally turned to her also. Soon he was neck-deep with his Royalist friends in a plot to effect her rescue.

Rumours of this plot reached Percy's ears through the Clunys, a family of *émigrés* who owed their rescue to him. He was in England at the time, but made immediate haste to come over to France in order to ascertain what truth, if any, there was in these rumours. No sooner had he set foot in Paris than evidence of the truth jumped to his eyes. There was more than one conspiracy afoot to rescue the Queen, and his friend Déroulède was deep in every one of them. Now, no one knew better than the Scarlet Pimpernel that to get Marie Antoinette out of prison and convey her to England or Belgium in safety was an impossible task.

To quote his own words once more: "The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel never fails," he said on one occa-

sion to his followers, "because it never attempts the impossible." His active brain, there is no doubt, had before now tackled the problem of the unfortunate Queen, but had to give up the attempt; not because of the difficulty of dragging a prisoner out of the Conciergerie—he had accomplished far more difficult tasks than that, not once, but a hundred times—but because of the personality of the Queen, her upbringing, her clinging to the great idea that the persons of crowned monarchs were sacred.

Her Austrian pride would never consent to obey the Scarlet Pimpernel's commands, to hide in a market gardener's coat under a pile of decaying refuse, to sleep in a common lodging-house or to ride astride on a pillion with her arms clinging round the waist of a foreigner who had never had the privilege of a personal introduction to her. Not only her actions, but her every gesture would not only have betrayed her, but also her rescuers.

And what the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel could not accomplish, Déroulède and his enthusiastic, but inept associates could not accomplish either.

2

Blakeney's alert brain now concentrated on a scheme to get Déroulède himself out of France. He had been the first to suspect Juliette Marny of treachery, but the problem was how to sow the seeds of this same suspicion in the mind of a lover.

At the first hint from his friend, Déroulède became adamant. Nothing would induce him to go back on his friends, he was convinced that given a modicum of good luck the plot to save the Queen was bound to succeed. Blakeney tried to use Paul's mother as a leverage to induce him to come away, but his entreaties on that score

only ended in Paul's begging him to convey his mother to England. He himself would only leave France in the suite of the Queen.

There is a brief note in one of Ffoulkes' diaries, which goes to prove that Blakeney's next idea was to kidnap Juliette Marny along with Paul and his mother, and take them willy-nilly on board the *Daydream* and Ffoulkes, it seems, did receive actual orders from the Scarlet Pimpernel for his share in that adventure.

But suddenly the crisis came.

Juliette Marny wrote the denunciation which brought the sleuths of the Committee of Public Safety into Déroulède's house and caused his arrest. She did this at a moment when a good deal of correspondence relating to his activities on behalf of the Queen was in his possession. It consisted probably of letters written by him, or to him, between his fellow conspirators, also plans in writing of how the rescue of the Queen was to be effected.

It is quite impossible to probe into the motives of a woman's actions. At the time that Juliette Marny wrote the anonymous denunciation against Déroulède—an authentic document by the way, still preserved in the archives of the city of Paris—she must have hated him. She must have known that she was sending him straight to his death. But less than three hours later she compromised herself hopelessly by extracting the fateful correspondence from Déroulède's bureau and throwing the papers into the fire, at the very moment when a small detachment of the Republican guard was demanding admittance into the house in the name of the Republic.

She was caught by the men in the very act of burning the last packet of letters; questioned as to their contents she refused to reply; she was accused of treasonable correspondence and put under arrest. But with the destruc-

tion of that correspondence there was no longer any proof against Paul Déroulède. With a wealth of apologies the accusation was withdrawn and he was allowed to go free.

The trial of Juliette Marny on a charge of treasonable correspondence with persons unknown—a correspondence which she had perfidiously destroyed—and of launching a false accusation against an esteemed patriot, was probably one of the most dramatic and turbulent that had ever taken place inside the Palais de Justice. It led directly to what is known as the Fructidor riots. Paul Déroulède, one of the most popular advocates at the Paris Bar, was Juliette's defender. His eloquence stirred the hearts of those spectators—all too few—who had a spark of compassion left in them for the terrible plight in which a refined young girl found herself. But, of course, her condemnation was a foregone conclusion. Not one in a hundred accused passed through the doors of the "Tribunal Extraordinaire" a free man or woman, and the eloquence of a Demosthenes could not have saved Juliette Marny who had been caught red-handed in an act of treason.

The morning of the trial, the members of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel received the following communication from their chief:

"I shall require every one of you to be present at the tribunal to-day. As Lenoir, I shall launch a denunciation of immoral conduct against Paul Déroulède, so as to involve him and the Marny girl in one accusation. You all know by heart the tactics which you must follow after that, so I need not repeat them now. All you have to do is to make as much noise as you can. Remember Lenoir.

Rue Jolivet first. Then Père Lachaise. I will let you have final instructions during the sitting."

The false Lenoir and his gang of cut-throats succeeded in their ruse. During the course of the trial the coal-heaver began by murmuring his accusations against the advocate, then against the girl, demanding her death on the grounds of immorality rather than treason; the challenge was taken up by his friends: France must be purged of sluts and loose fish. Their demands grew louder and louder and soon caused such an uproar that neither prosecutor nor defender could make himself heard. The judges vainly tinkled their bell, demanding silence. Soon the mob, excited by the turmoil, became uncontrollable: The League had succeeded in rousing its hatred against Juliette and Déroulède. With loud cries of execration, the crowd demanded *mise en accusation* of citizen Déroulède and citizeness Marny.

In the meanwhile every member of the League there present had received a brief communication:

"Be outside on the quay-side exit a quarter of an hour after we have started the tumult. I will keep the mob at fever heat until then. Watch for me as Lenoir with the two either on my shoulders or in the tumbril. Stick around me as close as you can. Only give a hand if you see me hard pressed, in which case concentrate on the prisoners and leave me to shift for myself."

"We did as we were bid," writes Ffoulkes in his journal, "and made our way to the quay-side entrance where the usual crowd of quidnuncs were already gathered to see the condemned prisoners come out. The tumbril was waiting and it looked as if a special guard had been hastily summoned for the occasion. Soon we saw Percy ges-

ticulating wildly and shouting his usual bloodthirsty cry. Juliette and Paul were carried out by two soldiers and pushed into the cart which started off immediately. We pressed close to it and, although it was dark, we could see Percy striding along.

"After a few minutes he contrived to speak to me. He told me that the mob had gone mad; and that all we need to do is to fall on the soldiers who were guarding the two prisoners and that he would give me the usual signal for this.

"Soon after that, we heard the signal, and we fell upon the soldiers to such good effect that we were left in possession of the tumbril. We carried the two prisoners to the rue Jolivet and here Percy presently joined us and explained to us his plan for reaching the Porte St. Antoine and for passing through without being challenged. In the first place we were to join in with the mob. The prisoners dressed in the same sort of rough clothes as we ourselves were wearing, were to come with us. Percy then, still wearing his Lenoir disguise, would continue to incite the mob to rioting, and to create as much noise and confusion in the streets as possible. The escape of the prisoners would be a pretext for a regular tumult. We were, of course, to keep as close to him as possible, remembering that the cry of the sea-mew would as usual be the rallying call.

"It was not very difficult in these days to arouse the excitement of the populace and Percy knew all the tricks that would do it. He knew how to wave his arms, his voice became raucous and stentorian at will, and he had a string of invectives at his command which would have given points to the lowest cut-throat in the city. On this occasion he surpassed himself. 'We are betrayed,' he shouted, 'the *aristos* have escaped!' and when the cry had

been taken up by the mob and cries of execration had been hurled at *aristos* and traitors, at the Government and the Committees, he went on still shouting: '*Aux barrières! Citoyens! Comrades!* Let us catch the traitors at the gates of our city!'

"One knows what an excited crowd is like at moments like this. It will follow, like sheep, any leader who shouts loudly enough. Led by Percy in the direction of the Porte St. Antoine, the mob followed blindly, never pausing to think whether the prisoners were more likely to escape through the Porte St. Antoine rather than through any other city gate. The town guard did not make any serious attempt to interfere. The officers thought, no doubt, that less harm would be done by letting the ebullient tempers have their way, than by trying to repress a tumult which would soon degenerate into rioting and bloodshed.

"There was a bit of a *bagarre* at the Porte St. Antoine. The mob, not knowing exactly what it did want, worked off its excitement by falling on the guard who, very wisely, only offered perfunctory resistance, making a rush through the gates in order to loot the stacks of provisions that were piled up outside, ready for entry into the city. Then it was that we heard the cry of the seamen. Dewhurst, Galveston and I were taking the prisoners between us, rallied round our chief. We kept up our rôles of mudlarks and gradually worked our way to the fringe of the crowd. The shades of evening were now drawing in: under their cover we turned off in the direction of Père Lachaise and soon were able to make for the 'Pleine Lune,' the small inn behind the cemetery, where the landlord and his family, who were in Percy's pay, made us all welcome."

Thus ended the Fructidor riots and Sir Andrew

Ffoulkes' notes go no further, but it may be surmised that the party of fugitives did not remain long in the vicinity of the city; whether they continued their way on foot, on horseback or in country carts, we know not, but what is a fact is that Paul Déroulède and Juliette Marny came safely to England, for they were married in the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Soho, on January 10th, 1794.

But Sir Percy Blakeney appears not to have accompanied his protégés very far, for he was back in Paris within the next twenty-four hours and remained in France until the summer of that terrible year. Glimpses may be caught of him striding through the streets of Lyons, arm-in-arm with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes or my Lord Stowmarries, rousing the echoes of its deserted streets with his infectious laugh; or his enigmatic personality may be guessed at under the disguise of a down-at-heel rascal who haunted the filthy prisons of Nantes, striving to snatch a few unfortunates from the murderous clutches of that abominable butcher, Carrier; or again, one becomes aware of the rattle of dice, the sound of a churchyard cough, a raucous laugh, as citizen Rateau sits in the Cabaret de la Liberté, sipping their sour wine, eyeing the customers of the Cabaret, listening to their talk, always on the look-out for some misfortune to alleviate, some sorrow to console.

3

Fiction has dealt with further adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel, but as a matter of fact there are very few authentic records of his doings during the nine months following the Fructidor riots.

There are one or two scraps of paper however, that

can be vouched for, for they are in Percy Blakeney's own handwriting. Two of these scraps are parts of letters obviously addressed to his wife, and both seem to suggest that at any rate on two occasions the Scarlet Pimpernel was actually a prisoner in the hands of the revolutionary Government and looking forward to summary death at the hands of his enemies.

One of these letters was apparently written in Boulogne: it is almost illegible and the date is missing: although it must have been written at a time of great stress, it breathes that marvellous optimism and confidence which is so characteristic of the gallant adventurer.

"I have very little time before me," it says, "for my friend C. seems in a demmed hurry to see me dangle at the end of a rope. But do not take this as a last farewell my beloved, for of a certainty I shall hold you in my arms before very long."

This letter may or may not have any connection with the account given in an English society journal of the time of a quarrel over the card-table, which occurred in the presence of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, between the accredited agent of the French Government and Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart.—a quarrel which ended in a challenge to a duel to be fought between the two gentlemen at Boulogne. To the searcher after truth it seems more likely that the quarrel and challenge were a ruse on the part of Armand Chauvelin to make sure of Blakeney's presence at a given time on an agreed spot in France. This theory is also confirmed by another curious document which is preserved in the archives of the city of Boulogne. This is a roughly printed proclamation promising pardon and freedom on a certain day and at

a given hour to all prisoners incarcerated in Fort Gayole and the old Château.

"Demain Decadi," it says, "à sept heures du soir, au son du canon venant de vieux Beffroi, les portes de Fort Gayole et du Château seront ouvertes, et tout prisonnier aura droit à cette présente amnistie, en vue de la déroute du plus vicieux ennemi de la partie."

The words "plus vicieux ennemi" clearly indicate the Scarlet Pimpernel, who was often thus referred to in *Documents Historiques* of the two previous years.¹

There is a further short allusion to Boulogne in another letter written by Sir Percy to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes—a letter which is doubly interesting, for it refers to the marriage of one of the most prominent members of the League, Lord Anthony Dewhurst, to Yvonne, daughter of the duc de Kernogan, a Breton nobleman who had emigrated to England at the outbreak of the revolution. The letter is dated December 1st, 1793, from 15 The Crescent, Bath.

"Dear Ffoulkes," it says. "As you will perceive from the above address, we have moved from Richmond. I wanted to stay at the 'Nest,' but I was ordered away from the sea by my beloved wife, who was afraid that I might slip away in the night to join you.

"During the mêlée on the ramparts at Boulogne, I received a slight injury to the right thigh. In the ordinary course of events, I would not have allowed it to worry me, but if I am to continue as an active leader of the League, I must give it careful doctoring. The learned

¹ *Documents Historiques. Tome XXVII. L'an de la République*, Collection Dubois et Herrot.

leeches say that the waters here are excellent and will ensure a speedy cure.

"Of course, our choice was influenced by H.R.H., who had recently made Bath fashionable, having adopted the place, so to speak, as his favourite spa. Naturally, he induced us, as soon as he knew that we should be in England for a while, to accompany him there.

"Well, my dear Ffoulkes, once again the leadership of our League devolves temporarily upon you, and I have no qualms about your devotion to your wits.

"I think that Tony will be happy with his Yvonne.

"Yours ever, Percy."

4

Early in 1794—i.e. January 6th or the 17th Nivose in the year II of the Republic—the Assembly of the Convention voted a new law, giving fuller powers to the two Committees of Public Safety and of General Security. This law enabled domiciliary searches to be made at the discretion of the Committees and authorized them to proceed summarily against all enemies of the republic. It also assured the sum of thirty-five *sous* to any of the Committee's spies who had been instrumental in "beating up game for the guillotine."

Blakeney and at least ten members of his League were in Paris at the time, though it is not known what their activities consisted in for the moment. Dangers attending these activities must have been increased an hundred-fold, for by this time the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, as well as that of some of his followers, must have been known to a number of the Committee's spies. All the same, the selfless devotion of the little band of adventurers had become more of a necessity than ever, and there seems to be no doubt that the Scarlet Pim-

pernel and most of the members of the League remained in France during the whole of '93 until the great crisis of Thermidor in '94.

There have been many contradictory tales told of the rescue of the little Dauphin—the uncrowned king of France—from the Temple prison, and many have claimed to have effected that rescue. But only one account bears the hall-mark of authenticity. It is not to be supposed that the Scarlet Pimpernel did not at some time or other of his adventurous career, turn his eyes to that most pitiful and pathetic sight in all Europe—the child martyr in the Temple. And as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel never attempted the impossible, it remains an undisputed fact that the child's rescue was effected by Percy Blakeney and by no one else.

Already, on January 16th, he adumbrated his plans before the most trusted members of his League. A meeting was held in a house on the Quai de l'Ecole, and it is to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' journal that history owes the knowledge of what took place on that occasion.

"'On one point, I am quite clear,' Percy declared to us," Sir Andrew says in his journal, "'and that is that His Majesty, Louis XVII, will come out of that ugly house in my company next Sunday, the nineteenth of January, in this year of disgrace, seventeen hundred and ninety-four. That day, the gaoler, Simon, and his wife, are moving out of the Temple, bag and baggage, and a new turnkey will take their place. For some time now, I have anticipated this event, for I have often talked with Simon and drunk sour wine with him at the Cabaret. I have made him understand that I own a cart and a donkey and that I earn my living by doing odd jobs of

furniture removal for a few *sous* per hour. He has engaged me to move his furniture for him this next Sunday. Chance has indeed played into my hands.' We were," Sir Andrew goes on to say, "dumbfounded at this news."

Further, there is a letter written by Blakeney to Sir Andrew which finally disposes of any doubt the serious student may have on the subject of that historic episode.

"Tony and Hastings," Sir Percy wrote to his friend, "will await me outside the Barrière du Trône at six-thirty to-morrow afternoon. I shall want you with me as my mate. The stage is set. I am Dupont, the removal man, and this I know, that those murdering blackguards will not lay hands on me while the most precious life in France is in my keeping."

Nothing could be clearer than that and it is absolutely inconceivable that the Scarlet Pimpernel, having formulated his plans, should have failed in its accomplishment. That it was not the Dauphin, the uncrowned king of France, who died of neglect and starvation in the Temple prison, the following has been proved over and over again beyond a doubt by French and English historians. The child who died in the Temple was two years older than the Dauphin, his hair was darker, his eyes of a different colour. He was substituted for the Dauphin as soon as the latter's disappearance from prison became known to the heads of the revolutionary Government, who feared public opinion and denunciations for connivance from their political adversaries.

The only fact susceptible of being controverted, is, what became of the boy afterwards? But this question

has been dealt with so often ¹ and at such great lengths by writers of divergent views on the subject, and is, in any case, so complicated that it cannot find a place in the biography of his rescuer. It is more than probable that Sir Percy Blakeney, after he had brought the most precious life in France to safety, placed it in the care of de Batz who was the accredited agent of the Emperor of Austria, the boy's nearest relative.

5

In spite of the fact that only young men in the immediate entourage of Sir Percy Blakeney, who were of unquestioned integrity, were enrolled as members of the League, it occurred on two occasions that the Scarlet Pimpernel was betrayed by one of them.

The best known case, and one which very nearly cost the gay adventurer his life, was engineered by Marguerite's own brother, Saint Just. It occurred directly after the escape of the Dauphin from the Temple. What led Armand to this abominable deed is in the domain of fiction, but the letter written by Sir Percy Blakeney in the Conciergerie prison to Armand St. Just, who partly burned it, is authentic. It was written at the dictation of Chauvelin, and was obviously a ruse, and part of a plan which, despite his terrible predicament, he had already begun to formulate.

"Mon état présent, mon cher ami, est devenu tel qu'il m'est impossible de le supporter. Le citoyen Héron ain . . . M. Chauvelin ont transformé . . . en un véritable enfer. De . . . nous quittons ces lieux et . . . guiderai le citoyen Hé . . . connu de nous où se . . ."

¹ *La question Louis XVII de M. Otto Friedrichs, chez H. Daragon, rue Blanche, Paris.*

Which scraps make it obvious that Héron and Chauvelin were offering Blakeney his release on condition that he led them to the place of refuge where he had hidden the Dauphin. In the letter he asks of St. Just to accompany him on that expedition. Marguerite was already in France. She had learned the awful news of her husband's incarceration from Ffoulkes.

"Our leader," Ffoulkes wrote to several members of the League, "is in the Conciergerie. God knows what is in store for him and for us all. No one has been allowed to see him, only his wife. The devils are trying to worm out of him the secret of the Dauphin's hiding-place. To break his resistance they are depriving him of sleep. But you know what he is? He will endure Hell rather than give in."

Later on, Ffoulkes appears to have been in communication with St. Just. The latter presumably showed him the letter he had received from Blakeney and which he had tried to burn. Only a few fragments of it remained, but Ffoulkes, the most loyal of friends, does not seem to have doubted for a moment that the letter was nothing but a ruse to throw dust in the eyes of those who thought that they had at last brought the Scarlet Pimpernel to dishonour and death. He sent another brief communication to the League, a communication which breathes that optimism which Blakeney had the power of infusing into his followers.

"It is a hellish situation," Sir Andrew wrote to Anthony Dewhurst: "but I, for one, do not despair. I may not be able to write again, so keep the League together

in case instructions reach us from the chief. But this could only happen by a miracle."

Many chroniclers—especially those whose sympathies tended towards the revolution—have averred that the miracle never took place, and that "the English spy" was duly hanged on the Place de Grève like a common criminal, unworthy of the guillotine. There certainly is not a scrap of evidence to show *how* the Scarlet Pimpernel got out of a seemingly hopeless situation, but that he did so is amply proved by the many allusions to him and to his lady and to his friends in the English society paper of the next few years. There is constant reference to Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney being present at one or another brilliant social function, to Sir Andrew and Lady Ffoulkes, to Lord and Lady Anthony Dewhurst, and to the wedding of "M. Armand St. Just, brother of the beautiful Lady Blakeney, to Mademoiselle Jeanne Lange, the one-time brilliant player of ingénue parts in the House of Molière."

Whether Marguerite ever knew or guessed that it was her brother's hand that nearly brought her husband to his death is, of course, impossible to determine. Sir Percy would naturally do his best to keep that awful revelation from her. It is undoubtedly characteristic of the Scarlet Pimpernel that he should have increased the difficulty of his own escape by taking his betrayer with him.

After that episode Paris became practically an impossible place in which to continue the activities of the League. Prudence did, at any rate, this once, gain the day, and suggested another sphere of action for the joyous band of adventurers. At any rate, during February and March, '94, Provence hears of the Scarlet Pimpernel for the first time. Deep in the black books of the

revolutionary Government after his many failures, Chauvelin was sent south: with what aim or for what purpose is not known. Anyway, he went and took up his headquarters at Orange; and Blakeney straightway turned his back on Paris and took up his residence in the same town.

The change of district called for new methods. The coast of England was now too remote; a journey right across France too perilous. From Orange, the Swiss or Italian frontier afforded safer avenues for escape. A certain amount of time must have been spent in reorganising the means of transport, but plans never took long in maturing in the Scarlet Pimpernel's lively brain and presently we find in Ffoulkes' journal several references to the League's adventures in Provence.

"February 10th. Percy has worked out a plan. We are to convey our protégés by coach to Grenoble and thence over the pass to Lausanne in Switzerland. We are enjoying ourselves hugely since our old friend Chauvelin is in the neighbourhood.

"February 15th. Percy and Hastings contrived to rescue twenty men and women from Avignon to-day. They are safely on their way to the frontier under the care of Barstow and Mackenzie. We have no difficulty with the inhabitants as most of them are in favour of their old *seigneurs*. They are a great help to us."

How long the Scarlet Pimpernel remained in the south it is impossible to say. Three months certainly, because there are records of over two hundred Frenchmen and women and children who passed through into Switzerland or Italy during this time; all of whom during the course of their life abroad testified that they owed their

lives to "a mysterious band of English gentlemen, who, under the leadership of a supernatural being, known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, risked their lives and fortunes in rescuing us from the murderous clutches of our enemies."

But in the spring of '94 he was back again in Paris and remained there until after the fall of Robespierre. Marguerite was with him then, most of the time, and there are scraps in Ffoulkes' journal which seem to suggest that she fell into a trap laid for her by Chauvelin, and was actually a prisoner in his hands until the great day in July, which saw the fall of Robespierre and the end of the reign of Terror.

It was during this period that a little incident occurred which is worth while recording. Through some means or other Chauvelin must have stumbled upon the truth as to Blakeney's impersonation of the asthmatic Rateau, and with some ulterior object in view, which is not quite clear, he either bribed or ordered the real Rateau to be branded on the forearm with the letter M. As soon as he became aware of this Blakeney, with characteristic thoroughness of method, promptly repaired to the veterinary surgeon who had done the branding, and had the same process repeated on his arm.

"Chauvelin ran into me the other day," he says in a letter to Ffoulkes, "I am doing scavenger work in the neighbourhood of the rue de la Planchette on alternate days with my friend the real Rateau. The first thing C. did was to push up my sleeve and examine my arm. By Gad! but I am having a lovely game with him over this."

It can be easily presumed from that letter that it was in some house in the rue de la Planchette that Marguerite was held in durance. This is all the more likely as one

of the houses in that street was inhabited by a woman named Théot, who was a supposed necromancer and fortune-teller, and an intimate of Robespierre, who often came to consult her. In the exercise of her nefarious trade, she had rendered valuable assistance to the Committee by listening to and reporting the often indiscreet conversations of her clients. She certainly was a spy in the pay of the Committees. It was owing to her denunciations that the two ladies Ste. Amaranthe were brought to the guillotine, and that Thérésia Cabarrus, the mistress of Tallien, was under arrest and awaiting trial, a few days before the dramatic downfall of Robespierre.

Whether it was owing to this same great political upheaval, or through the direct agency of the Scarlet Pimpernel that Marguerite regained her freedom, it is impossible to determine: that she did escape the fate that Chauvelin had destined for her is, however, an undisputable fact.

During the whole of the day that followed the overthrow of the Terrorist Government, she and her husband remained *perdu* in their lodgings in the rue de L'Anier, for it was not safe to venture out while the tumult in the streets was at its height. The reaction was bound to come soon and then they could slip quietly away.

Paris was crazy with joy; the tyrant had fallen, broken, maimed, bullied, insulted. And at four in the afternoon the end came, in the midst of the acclamations of a populace drunk with joy—acclamations which reached the ears of the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel and his wife.

When the shades of evening had gathered in over the jubilant city, a market cart, driven by a worthy farmer and his wife, rattled out of the Porte St. Antoine. . . .

PART THREE

“HAPPILY EVER AFTER . . .”

CHAPTER ONE

ROUTS AND RIOTS

I

BLAKENEY having conveyed Marguerite back to England, left almost immediately for France once again. The last rescue which the Scarlet Pimpernel undertook, though perhaps less spectacular than the others, was nevertheless one of the riskiest, for it entailed the rescue not of a Frenchman this time, but of an Englishman who had got himself entangled with the New Republican Government.

Young William Wordsworth, at that time an undergraduate at Cambridge, had joined a society known as the "Young Oxford Republicans," and was one of the moving spirits of that fellowship of young political enthusiasts whose spirit is expressed in his remarkable poem on the French Revolution. As a member of this society, Wordsworth made three trips in all to France, only two of which are recorded in his biographies, namely in 1790, 1791 and lastly in 1794. It appears that he viewed the political situation through the rosy spectacles of those young Oxford republicans, and that on his second visit he showed open sympathy with the party known as the Girondins.

On his third visit in 1794, he seems to have thrown all moderation to the winds and formed a friendship with Robespierre and his gang—a friendship which naturally involved him in their downfall. After the revolution of

Thermidor, he was arrested along with all the other members of Robespierre's party and would no doubt have shared their fate, had not his relatives made a direct appeal on his behalf to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

As to the exact details of the rescue of Wordsworth by Sir Percy Blakeney, there is but scant information available, for Blakeney went to France unaccompanied and effected the rescue unaided. That it occurred through his instrumentality is proved by a letter which he wrote to Ffoulkes soon after the event and which runs:

"DEAR FFOULKES,

"I felt that I could not leave the young fool to that horrible fate though, as you know, I have no sympathy for those idiotic clubs which have sprung up mushroom-like in England and Germany, in imitation of the foul nests in Paris we know so well. By Gad, it was one of the toughest nuts I ever cracked. The young man was no easy protégé for he breathed fire and brimstone at me. He seemed as if he wanted to be guillotined! They are all alike, these hot-heads, when, ostrich-like they bury their heads in new creeds they do not understand. But rescued he was, though do not ask me how. Chauvelin as you know, has suffered the death penalty for his many misdeeds. My only regret is that I shall never measure wits against him again. He was an engaging scoundrel."

2

The winter of 1795, saw the Blakeney's definitely established in their house in the Crescent at Bath.

Sir Percy was now faced with the sad duty of releasing his followers from their oath. That gallant band of sportsmen who had so ably, so fearlessly, so selflessly

seconded his adventurous expeditions, the wild rides through the night with trembling children or frightened women in one's arms, the hair's-breadth escapes and perilous gallops across country would henceforth be but memories.

The Scarlet Pimpernel would be only a name—a glorious and a noble name, it is true—the name of a small wild flower, faded, and pressed among the leaves of the book of the past. Little did Sir Percy dream that a century later the mere mention of the name, the mere sight of the tiny five-petalled flower in the hedgerows would recall to every romantic mind the glories of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel and of its gallant chief: that the records of his deeds would be eagerly read and recounted all the world over, as an example of courage and of daring, without parallel of self-sacrifice and of humility.

Sir Percy Blakeney felt the poignancy of this last meeting, which had been fixed for an afternoon in April, more deeply than he himself cared to admit. He was loath to let his little band of stalwarts go, hoping, perhaps, that some day in the near future they could unite once again for other daring adventures. But, for the nonce, they must be relieved of their oath of obedience and loyalty and a handclasp would be the final signal for the disbandment of the League: and with it, of all that it had stood for in his mind, the joy of living, unswerving courage and absolute loyalty.

His friends had of late begun to notice that Blakeney's character had altered during these months of inaction; the change, they felt, was apparent in the absence of his former unfailing good temper and gaiety. Except when in company or at cards, he seemed to have lost that spontaneous good humour which had, in the past, contributed so greatly to his enormous popularity. Not that he ever

grew morose or behaved with less charm than before, but his joyous laugh was heard to echo less and less frequently and it often struck the ear as harsh and forced. He was obviously fretting for those thrills which had for so long been the very breath of his life and he now found himself utterly unable to envisage a future which did not hold, if not danger, at least adventure.

Bereft of the exciting interest in life, he was like a man who has been forced to retire from active business and who has no hobbies or work to take the place of strenuous occupation. Those who knew him best and those who loved him the most could discern a far-away look in the lazy blue eyes when insistent memory caused him to relive the past, or imagination conjured up fresh visions of exploits as thrilling as they had been in the past. And ever and anon he would surreptitiously glance at the scar, in the shape of an "M," which had been branded on his right forearm.

All the morning of that fateful day, he was in a fever, pacing up and down the room like a caged lion, hardly realising that, indeed, this was the end of all that he had held so dear. Even the tender solicitude of his wife, and her efforts at cheerfulness, failed to alleviate his heart-ache and pain of a bitter regret. By the afternoon, he was in a state of real misery and for once felt a coward, dreading to meet his friends.

Marguerite wrote apropos of this final interview to Lady Anthony Dewhurst.

"MY DEAR LITTLE YVONNE,

"Do not grieve any more for my lord Anthony. He will be with you anon, never, please God, to desert you again. You, so wrapt up in the idyll which gives you

so much happiness and which the Scarlet Pimpernel made possible, have, it seems, not yet realised that those ghastly horrors are now but nightmares of the past and that, therefore, your husband is safe from those dangers that at one time threatened his precious life. As you know, the members of the League met here yesterday for the last time. Their chief had summoned them in order to bid them all good-bye— Good-bye that is as fellow-adventurers, but never good-bye as friends.

“Sir Percy is in a pathetic state and I hardly dare to say aught to rouse his drooping spirits. I, who love him so well, and suffered such terrible heartache every time he left me, could almost wish myself back in the days of peril. On more than one occasion, I have discerned suspicious moisture in his eyes! Sir Andrew told me after the interview that they were all deeply moved and that Sir Percy was hardly able to speak. It is now all over, a thing of the past, but I, for one, shall keep the memory of the Scarlet Pimpernel alive, and I shall hope to recount, one day, to his as yet unborn child, the prowess of his father.

“Sir Andrew and his wife are to remain with us here in Bath for a few days, a happy inspiration which I heartily support; perhaps the presence of his greatest friend will tend to soften the blow and help to bring him back to everyday life.

“I pray that we shall meet shortly at Richmond, whither we shall return as soon as the climate permits, but I fear me that Bath will hold our attraction for some time yet, since H.R.H. is still here and continually commands our presence.

“Your very affectionate friend,

“MARGUERITE BLAKENEY.”

There is also an interesting extract in the journal of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes.

"April 17th, 1795. Of course, we all knew that the summons would come sooner or later. The S.P. (I cannot help calling him that still) had touched upon the subject of the League's dissolution on the fateful day when he sallied forth on that great adventure which helped to bring about the downfall of Robespierre. But I must admit that I did not expect the blow to fall quite so soon. Found that I was one of the last to arrive with Hastings, Barstow and Mackenzie. Blakeney appeared to be his usual self. We handed him back the copies of our signed agreements, and in a few words, the S.P. told us that we were now free of any oath or obligation to which we had pledged ourselves. We drank to the past, the present and the future. I do not think that Percy spoke more than ten consecutive words after that. So ends our glamorous life of adventure! If it were not a blasphemy I would almost wish for another revolution, that would call us back to arms under the leadership of the Scarlet Pimpernel. I am now mightily glad that I kept some of his notes and papers so that our son when he comes shall know about him!"

3

The year 1795 ended with the London disturbances in which Sir Percy Blakeney played a not inconspicuous part. The Royal opening of Parliament was fixed for ten in the morning of October 29th and Blakeney, moved partly by his friendship for Pitt—a friendship which had never suffered by the years between—and partly by the insistence of the Prince who desired his presence on that occasion, drove out in the wake of the Royal procession.

The crowd, however, was out of hand; whistles and cat-calls greeted the approach of the Royal *cortège*, and stones were actually thrown at the carriages.

On the return of the *cortège* from the House of Parliament, more stones were hurled and one broke the window of Sir Percy's coach and landed on Marguerite's lap. Sir Percy rose to the occasion. Having stopped the carriage, he stepped out into the road and faced the angry crowd with a smile on his lips and a glint in his eyes which boded ill for the culprit. Surveying the spectators through his spy-glass, he loudly demanded to know who had had the demmed cheek to hurl a stone at his coach and to frighten his lady, and whether the culprit would care to oppose him for three rounds. There was a murmuring, much giggling and a few boos and shouts. At last a veritable giant of the typical cockney type stepped forth from the crowd, mocking the dandy and shaking his fist in Sir Percy's face. With a sudden dexterous movement, reminiscent of citizen Lenoir, Blakeney picked the man up with one hand as if he were a sack of potatoes and, advancing a few paces towards the row of now silent and awestruck spectators, he threw the body back to them, knocking many down with the sudden impact.

"La, my fine fellows," he cried, laughing; "you will have to find a more worthy champion of your cause if you hope for success. Try again! My offer still holds good for three rounds!"

But no one took up the challenge. They all stood agape, gazing open-mouthed at the dandy as he stepped back into his coach, not having turned a hair in the swift encounter; and the carriage drove away amid cheers!

That Christmas saw the Blakeney's still at Bath, gracing with their brilliance and their wit the many balls and

routs of the season. Sir Percy, no doubt, chafed often at the routine and boredom of this social round of functions for which he had invented in the past such an effective antidote. He contrived, however, to recapture some of its glamour when, at the request of the Prince of Wales, he was made to recount some of the now almost legendary feats of the Scarlet Pimpernel whom he was supposed to have known intimately.

"Thus did he relieve the monotony of these dull days," says Sir Andrew Ffoulkes of his life-long friend, "by living again in the stories which he told, some of our most exciting adventures. He told them with that wonderful restraint and sense of humour which was his most delightful characteristic, always exalting the prowess of the League as a whole and belittling that of its leader. So much so, indeed, that spiteful tongues began to wag, and accuse him of jealousy, and even went the length of hinting that the mysterious adventurer whom Blakeney was at such pains to disparage, had incurred his displeasure by arousing a sense of hero-worship in the heart of his beautiful wife."

All of which must have been a source of delight to Blakeney himself. In his usual indolent way, he allowed those spiteful shafts to be aimed at him in public, for it gave him an opportunity of sharpening his ever-ready, caustic wit at the expense of his detractors.

But it was not to be wondered at that this intimate knowledge which Sir Percy Blakeney seemed to have of the Scarlet Pimpernel caused a veritable storm of gossip in social circles. He was pestered with enquiries anent the identity of the enigmatic hero; bets were made as to whom would be the lucky one to extract information from him. But though the necessity for anonymity was now past, neither Blakeney himself, nor any of his fol-

lowers, ever betrayed the secret to which they had at one time pledged themselves. And it was a strange fact, though obviously a true one, that the skipper and crew of the *Daydream* guarded that secret every bit as jealously as did the members of the League.

Thanks to Sir Percy's wonderful generosity, these men were no doubt more than well-off and well provided for: the skipper, by now, was probably a rich man: but even so, tribute must be paid to the discretion of, perhaps, half a hundred men, every one of whom could have gained immense popularity in public bars and eating houses, by recounting some of the adventures in which the *Daydream* had a share.

To the repeated enquiries levelled at Blakeney in all classes of society, he gave evasive replies. So did the members of the League, and so did the skipper and crew of the yacht. The only true information they one and all condescended to give to the gossip mongers was that the Scarlet Pimpernel did not, as many supposed, and as the upholders of the late revolutionary Government tried to make out, perish on the guillotine. But, as was perhaps inevitable, as gossip grew in volume, some people—more astute than others—came, perhaps, very near the truth; and there is no doubt that the Prince of Wales knew more than he cared to admit. His usual curt replies to respectful enquiries were often quoted in the society journals of the time: "Ask Blakeney about your hero; he knows him."

The first days of the new year were destined to be eventful ones in Sir Percy's subsequent life, for they undoubtedly paved the way for the new trend of thought which led him to further adventures. On January 3rd, Sir Percy met Commodore Horatio Nelson at a banquet given by the Lord Mayor of London.

"Our talk," Blakeney records in his diary, "was chiefly of that demmed Scarlet Pimpernel. The little sailor would talk of nothing else. H.R.H., he told me, had referred him to me and he would give me no peace till I had described some of the League's most successful efforts in outwitting the revolutionary spies. We spoke together for over an hour, and I was waxing more and more impatient. In the end he said with a sigh: 'Well, Sir Percy, we must live in hopes that your hero will continue his prowess by sea. England hath still need of such men as he!'"

No doubt a keen student of human nature like Blakeney would quickly discern in "the little sailor" as he calls him, the same joy of adventure, the same recklessness when faced with overwhelming odds and the same determination to see a thing through that had animated him throughout his career in revolutionary France; whilst Nelson's few words, spoken with that rare charm and earnestness which had the power of arousing patriotism and loyalty in every man who had heard him speak, did undoubtedly infuse the hope in Blakeney's heart of renewed activity in the cause of humanity and for the glory of his country and his King.

The immediate effect of this momentous meeting was Sir Percy's generous gift of a large sum of money for the benefit of disabled and aged sailors.

The terrific expenditure of the war had depleted the Exchequer to an alarming extent. The strength of the army and the navy, having been reduced the year before, both were now inadequate for the preservation of England's safety on sea and land and funds were sorely needed for their upkeep. The Heir to the Throne made a personal appeal to the generosity of private individuals who were rich enough to contribute from their surplus

wealth something towards the defence of their homes and the very source of their prosperity.

The result of this appeal was that Blakeney's fortune provided a man-of-war for the service. The ship, the building of which had at the time been nearly completed, but had been suspended owing to the lack of funds, was rapidly commissioned and, having been rechristened *The Marguerite* by Lady Blakeney herself, sailed away to her ultimate destruction at the battle of the Nile.

4

A great event in the annals of the Blakeney family occurred early in February, 1796, an event which not only astonished society in general, but also the debonair Sir Percy himself, who, having noticed his wife's sudden distaste for dancing and the amenities of the social round, did not guess the real cause. He himself was earnestly encouraged by Marguerite to go off on a fishing expedition, which he did, and to his amazement on his return to Bath a few weeks later, he was met at the door by leech and midwife who imparted to him the joyful news.

Sir Percy was never able to analyse his own feelings when first he gazed down upon the lump of living flesh which was his first-born son. Fatherhood, as such, had never touched him. His own indifference to Sir Algernon and their unfortunate estrangement had distorted the paternal outlook to such an extent that he could not, at first, visualise the fact of his own position as father. In the beginning, as was perhaps only natural, his thoughts flew to his wife. He felt like the majority of men, that the new-comer was an interloper between himself and his love, so that it was with mixed emotions that he greeted the advent of his son.

Gradually, however, out of that perplexed state of mind there emerged the sensation of pride. The congratulations of friends gave the event a note of importance. And it presently dawned upon him that, as a matter of fact, this was exactly what he had been waiting for all his life; the birth of one who would perpetuate his name and race had all along, and unbeknown to himself, been the true purpose of his existence and the main-spring of his actions. It stood for the only true immortality!

"Dear Ffoulkes," he wrote, on February 10th, in answer to the letter of congratulation from his friend, "you tell me that the same happy event is in store for you. I wonder whether you will experience the same emotions and feelings as I did when the birth of George was announced to me. I confess that I have not got this fact very clear in my dull mind as yet, but this much I do know; all that I did, all that I have ever thought, was merely an anticipation of this event. For the first time since the end of our adventures together I am proud to have been the Scarlet Pimpernel; proud that I have something in my past to bequeath to the future.

"What will become of George? This now is my only thought. All my energies will be concentrated on this problem. To its solution I shall apply all my faculties. Perhaps I shall be able to make something of him; something which his father never could have realised. I pray God that it will be so!"

George Blakeney was christened at Bath Abbey, the Prince of Wales standing Godfather to the infant.

There was an amusing sidelight to the event. Coincidences seemed to be busy in the social set which revolved round the Blakeneys. The gossip mongers were confounded by the birth of a Blakeney heir, for they had

laid down the axiom that the quarrel between them, begun so soon after their honeymoon, had never been patched up, whilst Sir Percy's wanton and open desertion of his wife during the greater part of the previous four years did, in the opinion of these tittle-tattlers, exclude any possibility of a reconciliation having ever taken place.

And all of a sudden now, not only was Sir Percy Blakeney a proud father, but most of his elegant friends followed suit. Children were born about this time to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Anthony Dewhurst. As the latest *bon-mot* from the mouth of the Prince had it: "The Scarlet Pimpernel must have given one last and imperious summons to his League ere disbanding it!"

Now that Blakeney was forced into a more or less passive life, he required a new interest to arouse him from the attack of melancholy which seemed at one time to have taken a fatal hold on his spirits. Young George provided that necessary distraction. Within a few weeks of his son's birth, his old time gaiety had returned to him. The streets of Bath resounded to his infectious laugh and he brought good cheer wherever he went. The croakers who had dolefully shaken their heads and declared that Sir Percy Blakeney, the elegant dandy, was on the way to melancholia, were happily disappointed, whilst the ladies bemoaned the fact that Sir Percy had become a model husband and a veritable stay-at-home. His excuses for appearing late at balls; his lame apologies for unpunctuality, were now all connected with George, and were received with leniency and good humour.

"George was laughing, madam," he would say, "Egad, he can laugh as heartily as his father. Faith, you should come and hear him one of these days. It would do your digestion more good than all these demmed waters you

drink. My wife declares that he will be as inane as I am! So you understand, I could not interrupt the concert!"

And Society had to be content with these excuses, or else incur Sir Percy's displeasure, and it was better to have the attendance of Sir Percy, however late he might choose to turn up, than count the failure of one's rout by holding it without him.

5

In spite of all the joys and responsibilities of fatherhood, however, this same year saw the end of Blakeney's enforced idleness.

Though England was, as a whole, desirous of continuing the war with France, Pitt and his immediate followers were inclined towards peace. He made, about this time, a determined effort to procure a cessation of hostilities. To this end, he was backed up by the King himself. As a first attempt, negotiations were opened up through the Danish ambassador in Paris, but the high-handed tone which the Directoire adopted towards the British Government left very little hope of a reconciliation between the two countries. It appeared that the French, as a nation, were as anxious to continue the war as were the people of England and the voices of one or two of their citizens which were raised in favour of peace were drowned by the popular clamour for more bloodshed. And as far as England was concerned, it was, perhaps, unfortunate that at the very moment when Pitt was striving to initiate negotiations for peace and had almost succeeded in bringing round to his views a majority in Parliament, victories, both on sea and land, awoke in the masses a thirst for further conquests.

A few months later, however, France, finding herself exhausted of men and short of money, declared herself

willing to resume negotiations for peace with England, but she would only receive overtures through direct diplomatic channels and not through an intermediary. To this end she would provide the English plenipotentiaries with the necessary passports.

Pitt, delighted at these overtures, appointed Lord Malnesbury to head the English delegation to France. He was an experienced and tactful diplomat and obviously the right man to choose for the task. But like most Englishmen, he was conversant with no other language but his own, and his knowledge of the aims and ideals of the new French Government was practically nil. He was the first to suggest to the Prime Minister that he should be accompanied on his mission by someone who possessed that knowledge and who spoke French fluently. In casting round for such a man, Pitt's thoughts naturally turned to his Harrow friend whom he knew to have been in constant touch for years with French affairs and who had before now done good work on diplomatic missions.

"Dear Blakeney," wrote Pitt on February 11th, "I expect that H.R.H. has already informed you of our projects for reopening peace negotiations with France. Though her terms have all along been impossible of acceptance, she is undoubtedly in a humbler frame of mind to-day; all the same I would greatly value your views on our chances of success since your knowledge of French people and of their present Government has probably supplied you with facts such as are not in our possession, and I feel that you have been able to gauge more accurately than any one else in England the attitude of the French nation towards war. Our intermediaries have either been duped or else have relied more on their imagination than on actual facts.

"Naturally this communication, my dear Percy, is strictly confidential and I rely upon your discretion in this matter. If we are to reopen communications with Paris, perhaps you would care to join the Embassy."

Blakeney's answer was characteristic of the man.

"MY DEAR PITT,

"You should have realised by now that that demmed French Government is still composed of a pack of murdering blackguards, despite the relaxation of their reign of Terror. On my last journey to France at the end of last year, the populace was certainly in favour of peace, but the Directoire is filled with hatred for our country and I do not think would receive any reasonable overtures for peace in the right spirit. That Italian upstart, General Bonaparte, is very hostile towards us and it appears as if he was destined to rise to a prominent position in the Government. He dreams—so I heard tell—of invading England and setting one of his brood upon our throne! Should any offers of peace be received from that quarter, beware! They would be merely a cloak for further hostile actions and a breathing space to enable them to reorganise their army and to plan further campaigns; the ultimate result would be a war more bitter and more strenuous than the last one. Naturally I do not expect you to give credence to my humble observations, but I do beg of you to watch your every step before you proffer the olive branch.

"Should any conclusion be arrived at, I would willingly help you to the best of my poor capacities."

Pitt for some unexplained reason was annoyed by the tone of Blakeney's letter. Whether he was merely angry

at reading Percy's unfavourable opinion of his own hopes of peace or whether his resentment was actuated by jealousy on finding that Blakeney upheld the view of the opposition on the subject, it is difficult to say, since there was no answer to this letter; certain it is that for a brief period there was a distinct coolness between the two friends.

At functions which Pitt and Blakeney both attended, scandalmongers soon noticed that the once fast friends seemed to avoid each other and that the coolest greetings passed between them when chance brought them face to face. Needless to say, neither of them satisfied the curiosity of the quidnuncs by divulging the cause of their apparent estrangement which, by the way, was more of Pitt's making than Blakeney's. The former refused to patch up the differences between them and bore his resentment with very bad grace.

However, a few months later, yielding to the King's earnest wish, Pitt again appealed to the French Government to reconsider the question of a cessation of hostilities. This time the outlook was much more hopeful for a successful reopening of negotiations, since the drain in men and money caused by the war was affecting both belligerents equally.

Forgetting his show of temper, Pitt once more approached his friend Blakeney.

"DEAR PERCY,

"The King has authorised me to open negotiations with the French Government and they, in their turn, seem quite as anxious as we are to discuss a treaty of peace. I have been informed by the French Foreign Minister that safe conducts will be granted to a mission coming from us, and that the personnel of such a mis-

sion will receive adequate protection and consideration.

"I have once more approached Lord Malmesbury on the subject and he declares his readiness to head the delegates. I hope that your offer to accompany his lordship in a private capacity still holds good, and that you will place yourself at our disposal for this purpose. You will, should you be so inclined, accept this letter as your official invitation to join the mission.

"If you are free to-morrow, come and dine with me *à deux*, and I will put you in full possession of the facts and also of the questions which we hope will be answered affirmatively by the French Government.

"Yours sincerely,
"WILLIAM."

"MY DEAR WILLIAM,

"I am flattered that you should deem me a useful person to join the peace delegation. I shall be only too honoured to accompany Malmesbury, whom I know personally, and who will, I think, prove the right person for this delicate work.

"I shall look forward to to-morrow evening and pray that you will enlighten me as to my rôle in the business.

"Yours sincerely,
"PERCY."

This delegation set out soon after, buoyed by extravagant hopes of success which were not destined to be realised, even in part. Blakeney's prognostications were fulfilled. As soon as Paris was reached, the delegates were met with rebuffs at every turn, and with nothing but arrogance on the part of the French Government. Sir Percy tried to pour oil on the troubled waters of national

pride and prejudice whenever the French commissioners effectively put an end to negotiations.

The fault of the impasse must be laid at the door of Marat, afterwards Duc de Bessano, the head of the French commission. It was evident that there was a want of cordiality and sincerity on the part of this man who seemed incapable of seeing the English point of view. He seemed purposely to aggravate the situation and, whenever some headway had been accomplished, he would throw a bombshell into the assembly in the shape of some new and impossible demand. Malmesbury, too, was apt to vacillate and refuse to come to any decision without first submitting every question and every answer to his own Government. Blakeney was constantly travelling to and fro with various messages since the *Daydream*, his yacht, was faster and surer than the ordinary packet boats, and thus the minimum of time wasted. He also expressed himself very forcibly to Pitt in a letter.

"Matters are going from bad to worse," he writes, "unless some miracle happens, I fear me that we shall return empty-handed. For some reason or other, the French are deliberately dragging out the negotiations and will not listen to our point of view. From remarks which I have overheard, I have reason to believe that the Directoire are secretly making great and extensive preparations for the invasion of Ireland and they are counting on a separate and very advantageous peace with Austria.

"I think that you should send someone else to parley with Marat. This astute Frenchman is leading Malmesbury up the garden path and as soon as the negotiations finally break down the rupture will be ascribed to us."

Thus the conference dragged itself out until well into December without any definite results. There were re-

ports that the English were hissed in the streets of Paris and that on more than one occasion stones were hurled at them. At last, the French Government came into the open and invited Lord Malmesbury and his suite to quit French soil within twenty-four hours. Thus ended ignominiously all the English wholehearted attempts at peace.

On the return of the delegation, Pitt was so disappointed at the frustration of his cherished hopes, that it required all Blakeney's tact to avoid another breach of their friendship. But events were proving too strong for Pitt. The public was glad that the negotiations had been broken off. At the Lord Mayor's Show, which was as brilliant as usual, Pitt who drove in the procession was insulted by the crowd, whilst Fox, the favourite of the day and leader of the Opposition, was heartily applauded.

War was soon ravaging Europe again. At the opening of Parliament, His Majesty was obliged in his speech from the throne, to inform his faithful Commons that all attempts at negotiating peace with the French Government had failed. Pitt, violently attacked over his new scheme of taxation, was threatening to resign. This news reached Blakeney's ears via the Prince of Wales, and he went straightway to his friend to argue the point with him and to dissuade him from so drastic a step.

"Saw old William," Blakeney writes in his diary, dated December 16th, 1796, "and told him not to be a demmed fool over those new taxes of his, especially as H.R.H. has informed him that the King would be very grieved to accept his resignation. War is the popular cry of the moment and all that Pitt need do is to bottle up his desire for peace at any price and approve the war to secure an overwhelming majority. Begad, thank heavens, I am no politician."

6

A somewhat curious incident occurred about this time, one to which Sir Andrew Ffoulkes makes a somewhat cryptic allusion in his diary, and which Sir Percy Blakeney in a letter to his friend treats with his usual flippancy.

On December 28th, the weather being exceptionally mild that year, Sir Percy, having returned to Richmond with his wife from a dinner-party in London, lingered in the stables as he very often did to fondle his favourite horses, talk to them and give them titbits out of his pocket. He was walking back towards the house when his ears caught the sound of a whispered conversation which seemed to come from behind a line of shrubs that bordered the lawn on the river-side.

Poachers, thieves and racing crooks abounded in the district, and Blakeney, thinking that some of these louts were sneaking round the premises with nefarious intent, made his way cautiously across the lawn in the direction whence the muffled sound had come. But evidently the ruffians had sensed his presence, for when he drew near stealthily, and paused in order to listen, every sound was stilled. He went on, however, still cautiously and had almost reached the line of shrubs, when his quick ear detected a stealthy footstep coming this time from behind him. He paused, peering into the darkness before him, as if uncertain whether to retrace his steps or to continue on. That pause probably saved his life as the assassin had undoubtedly counted on attacking him from behind, whilst a confederate drew his attention away in the opposite direction. As it was, Blakeney was still facing the shrubbery when he caught sight of a vague form springing at him, one hand holding up a knife.

In an instant Blakeney had caught hold of the upraised

arm with such a grip of steel that the miserable wretch gave a squeal of pain. With a twist of Blakeney's iron wrist, the knife, a murderous weapon with a hunting blade, fell out of his hand. The accomplice in the meanwhile, hearing the screams and thinking no doubt that the nefarious deed had been accomplished, hurried to the scene of action only to be greeted by the terrifying sight of his confederate writhing in the powerful grip of their intended victim. The new-comer, half mad with terror, hurled himself on Sir Percy, but a straight left from the most powerful fist in England soon disposed of this second assailant, who collapsed unconscious on the ground. Blakeney then called to his stablemen and ordered them to lock the two miscreants up in the hayloft and there to leave them until the police came to retrieve them the next morning.

"I'm demmed flattered!" is all Sir Percy wrote about the event. "Someone has honoured me by finding me a worthy subject for assassination. Begad, it's a good story and I pray that the unknown one will not be too disappointed at the blundering of his minions."

The next morning, Blakeney in a moment of idleness thought he would interview the two wretches. He found them in the hayloft reduced to a state of abject cowardice. At sight of Sir Percy, they immediately fell to pleading for their lives. The humour of the situation made a strong appeal to Blakeney. It soon transpired that the two men were only tools in the hands of another, who had paid them well to do his dirty work for him. By dint of alternate threats of the hangman's rope and broad hints of possible pardon, Blakeney gradually wormed a true account of the conspiracy out of the men, as well as the name of their task-master. Whereupon, with that magnanimity which he always displayed towards the

underdog, he gave each man who had tried to murder him five guineas and sent them about their business, with a final kick, and more threats of the gallows if they blabbed.

"Begad, the whole affair is priceless," he wrote to Ffoulkes on the subject of the incident. "Those wretched men were in terror lest I should hand them over to justice, but such an idea never entered my head. My one thought was to discover the author of the delicate attention. And the revelation was not long in forthcoming. When I did hear what was obviously the truth it astounded me and I burst out laughing, for their instructions had been to put a knife into your humble servant and the poor brutes who knew something about me were half paralysed with fear even before they embarked on their little excursion.

"Of course I had suspected all along that the author of the pleasant incident belonged to our own set in society. And unless I am very much mistaken you will have guessed his name by now. All the same, it seems incredible to me that our mutual friend of the League should have nourished such bitter resentment against me all this long while for the slightly mischievous trick which I played on him that night at Nantes. I might have understood his hate had I left him in the lurch then, but as it was . . . well, I give it up.

"Of course, my dear Ffoulkes, you will keep this absurd incident a secret. I have not mentioned it to Marguerite, nor do I want her to get as much as an inkling of the matter.

"I shall personally not refer to the subject again, but his lordship had better keep his own knowledge of it to himself as I fear I would lose my temper should he make

public allusion thereto. As it is, I hope that he will detect no difference in my manner towards him, for I do not intend to take any official notice of his murderous attack upon yours truly.

"But all the same, it was demmed amusing and I am vastly flattered."

Blakeney kept his word; he never divulged, beyond the hint contained in the above letter, the identity of the enemy, or the reason for the latter's revengeful jealousy for an imagined grievance.

But as a consequence (and the inference seems obvious), a mild sensation was caused in society early in January of the following year when it was learned that one of its most brilliant members, son of a peer of the realm and the heir to a vast fortune, Lord Kulmstead by name, had suddenly disappeared from his usual haunts without giving any reason for his abrupt departure, nor any indication of his probable destination. The Prince of Wales asked Blakeney for an explanation, but the latter seemed as ignorant as every one else, only vouchsafing an elegant shrug of his shoulders and a polite yawn. A few remarked a slightly malicious twinkle in the blue eyes and vowed that he could enlighten their curiosity had he so willed.

And that was the only sequel to the event as far as Sir Percy Blakeney was concerned.

CHAPTER TWO

"DAYDREAMS . . . AND NIGHTMARES!"

I

IN the summer of 1797, Pitt, in spite of his former check, tried once again to conclude peace with the French, which seemed to him more imperative than ever. England's maritime supremacy was menaced on all sides. True, the naval victory of Cape St. Vincent somewhat minimised the danger, but the general optimism which had been raised by it was more than counteracted by the mutiny which broke out first at Spithead and soon spread to the Nore.

By the end of May, the entire fleet was in a state of insubordination and on the twenty-third of the month the red flag was hoisted on board Admiral Buckner's flagship, to which every man-of-war sent delegates. These delegates held meetings, went on shore and paraded the streets of Portsmouth with banners and music. Panic was now in the air. The public felt that the country's security was being menaced by a worse enemy than the French. It was also felt that news of the mutiny would filtrate through across the Channel and encourage General Bonaparte to spring a surprise attack upon the country.

The Government was apparently too weak to take any decisive step that would put an end to this disastrous state of affairs. And it was stated positively in official circles that, at best, it would take several months to re-

organise the navy into an efficient engine of war. Ever since the meeting with Nelson, Blakeney's thoughts had turned towards the sea and he had often wondered whether he could use both his wealth and his peculiar talents in that direction. True, he had never seriously contemplated seeking adventure on the ocean; up to the present, he had merely toyed with the idea. But the mutiny in the fleet, with its disastrous results upon English maritime supremacy, gave his thoughts that impetus which ultimately drove him to adopt the sea as the scene of further activities.

As soon as the news of the mutiny reached the ears of the French there began a series of raids on unprotected English merchant shipping, and later on, forays against isolated coastal townships. This menace continued for many months, and while it lasted, caused severe damage to shipping. Naturally, this new peril added to the general apprehensiveness. It was with the idea to combat this danger that Blakeney conceived the notion of transforming his yacht, the *Daydream*, into a ship of war.

With this end in view he left London and took up residence at the "Nest," which, it may be remembered, was situated conveniently near Dover. The minute harbour which adjoined the property was, from then on, a scene of violent activity. Workmen swarmed over the beach: mechanical appliances lay strewn on the sands; the sky was lit up with the glow of fires. The *Daydream* was hauled out of the water and now rested on a cradle, like some fabulous monster brooding on its nest. There she was, her ribs bare to the elements, whilst expert constructors refashioned her hull. The tall, massive figure of Sir Percy could be seen at all hours of the day, striding up and down, giving words of command, supervising the work, helping to haul timber and metal with the best of

them. This feverish activity continued throughout the summer and autumn.

Gradually, the intended transformation took place; the elegant slim lines of the fast sailing yacht were replaced by heavily protected flanks: the tall, tapering masts gave way to businesslike ones, capable of putting up a good fight against storms and rough seas. Instead of the sumptuous cabins which had been her owner's delight, lockers, powder magazines and gun carriages filled her structure. Ugly nosed cannon pushed their muzzles through the portholes which no longer gave on elegant dining-room or sumptuous sleeping-berths, but rather on workmanlike cabins. And when the preparations were completed, no one would have recognised in the war-like corvette which now rode the waves, the luxurious yacht which had been the admiration of all experts, when she lay gracefully balanced in the Dover Roads.

2

But Blakeney, as was his wont, kept these activities secret. Not even to Marguerite had he revealed his intentions with regard to the *Daydream*, and all his friends were kept in ignorance of the cause of his frequent absences from London and Richmond.

Now that preparations on the ship were completed, there came the question of the crew. Blakeney had never ceased to keep in touch with the original skipper and men of the *Daydream*. He had dismissed and pensioned them off with his usual liberality as soon as circumstances put an end to the activities of the Scarlet Pimpernel. But naturally at this juncture his thoughts turned at once to these faithful and loyal seamen. He sent a summons to every one of them to attend him on a given day at the

old "Fisherman's Rest" at Dover, and there, over mugs of home-brewed ale he promised them work and adventure more exciting and more perilous than the mere piloting of a gentleman's yacht across the Channel. The proposal so appealed to them that the lot there and then agreed to enlist in his service again. Here, too, he took on some extra hands, for his projects were now maturing, and he knew that he would require more men both for boarding and to fill casualties.

But Blakeney was not satisfied with the arrangements as they stood. A new turn of ideas had taken hold of his imaginative brain. At the outset he had only intended to use the newly conditioned *Daydream* as a defensive vessel against the French raiders. But, as the work progressed, he conceived the notion of using her as a warship and to retaliate against the enemy by undertaking similar raids on the French coast. This new idea required skilled co-operators for he was not himself an expert sailor, and he deemed the hazards too complicated for a mere sportsman.

True, there was the skipper, Arthur Greaves, a skilled seaman who had sailed round the world before the mast and had gained a high reputation in the merchant service as a reliable navigator, but, owing to the prospective adventures, Blakeney felt that he needed a man who had had some experience of naval warfare, a man capable of taking command when facing an enemy ship at sea. With this end in view, he turned to his former companions, Sir Edward Mackenzie and Sir Philip Glynde, both of whom had been among the original members of the League, and therefore men whom he knew well and could trust implicitly.

Sir Edward Mackenzie's father had been a famous sea-captain whose ancestors had sailed the Spanish Main with

Drake and Raleigh, and whose family had been, from time immemorial, connected with the sea. Naturally enough, the father had intended that Edward should adopt the navy as a career, and, indeed, the young man had already served a useful apprenticeship during the Seven Years' War, but the sudden death of old Sir Anthony had caused Edward's premature retirement from the navy when only a lieutenant and he had been leading a useless and idle life until the formation of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

During the League's activities, Blakeney had soon discovered that Mackenzie was one of those thoroughly reliable and steady men who are invaluable in the face of any crisis. His brain worked slowly it was true, but this was because it weighed every odd most carefully, and never took unnecessary risks, but once the man's mind was made up, he went straight and fearlessly for his goal.

As a contrast to Mackenzie, and as it were his complement, Sir Philip Glynde was the ideal lieutenant for Blakeney's needs. Glynde could claim an equal length of service and tradition in the navy as Sir Edward, but he had attained a higher rank owing to his exceptional talent for seamanship which was almost in the nature of an instinct with him, so innate was it. Here was a man after Blakeney's own heart, a man who could seize chance by the forelock without weighing the consequences; a man who acted on impulse rather than on calculation, who did not wait for orders or count the probabilities. These two men, Blakeney thought, would counterbalance each other and compose the perfect duet on board the *Daydream*.

"My dear Edward," Blakeney writes to Mackenzie on June 12th, 1797, "would you care to join me in an-

other little venture? I am afraid that this time there is no question of another League or of such joyous adventures as those in the past, but I think that we might scrape some fun out of the idea. I have reconditioned the *Daydream* so that she is now as good a fighting vessel as money can make her and I have been lucky enough to engage our brave old friend Greaves and most of the original crew. But I am helpless without your skilled co-operation since I am no sailor and Greaves is no warrior.

"It is obviously impossible to outline my plan in a letter but I am inviting Glynde to join us. Should this appeal to you, come and stay at the 'Nest' next Monday, to-day week, when we can discuss details and also inspect the *Daydream*. Bring with you any advice which you may deem necessary. Your old friend, Blakeney."

A similar letter was despatched to Sir Philip Glynde with the result that both men accepted the invitation and duly arrived at the "Nest" on the appointed day. Not only Blakeney himself, but his wife was also there to receive them. When first she heard of Sir Percy's projects she was utterly dumbfounded. Already she had guessed from his mysterious activities that something was afoot, but she was the last woman in the world to let her husband know anything of the anxiety which she felt. That in those activities and in the invitation sent to Mackenzie and Glynde to meet Percy at the "Nest," she foresaw not only anxiety but sorrow, is evidenced by a letter which she wrote on the following day after the arrival of the visitors.

"My dear Suzanne," she wrote to Lady Ffoulkes on the twenty-fourth of June of that year, "My heart is heavy within me. Percy has engaged himself on some

new and mad adventure, the nature of which has been kept secret from me. He has invited Mackenzie and Glynde, former members of the League, to assist him. All I can guess at is that his new enterprise is connected with the sea, as the *Daydream* has been refitted and it appears that he is contemplating raiding the French coast in her.

"I, of course, have no say in the matter. I cannot prevent it nor can I participate in it. The early days of the League will be recalled to my mind, with all their attendant horrors and suspenses. And once again I must contrive to smile and to joke whilst Percy is risking his life."

Truly, she must have been a remarkable woman, this wife of Sir Percy Blakeney, for she was always ready to endure sorrow and to bear tribulation, and did it with supreme courage. And, like all wise and loving women, she never attempted to turn her husband from his avowed purpose, nor did she question his motives. She had learnt her bitter lesson in the past and was now too wise to prejudice the future with recriminations. In this instance also, as soon as she learned his project she welcomed the news with a brave smile, and did her best to encourage him and his friends, and to assist them with counsel and advice.

3

Glynde and Mackenzie went into raptures over the new *Daydream*. Those two severe critics could find no flaw in the construction and agreed that the equipment was the finest possible, rivalling the government contracts in the high standard of workmanship and materials.

But, just as everything seemed ready for immediate action, a hitch occurred which delayed sailing for thirty-six hours.

It was Glynde who brought the problem up. What was to be their position? Should Blakeney take out "Letters of Marque" from the Government, thus legalising their position, or should they just sail away as the fancy took them? The former procedure, whilst giving official approbation to their enterprise, would place them on approximately the same footing as an ordinary warship, and in case of capture, they would be treated as legitimate prisoners of war.

Blakeney was averse to this scheme. And this for three reasons. Firstly, because of the inevitable notoriety and publicity which it would entail and which he cordially detested. Secondly, he felt that it would restrict the field of their activities since, in a great measure, he and his lieutenants would no longer be free agents. They would be subject to the whims of a higher command which might not see quite eye to eye with them nor view their possible exploits from a favourable angle. And thirdly—a thirdly which counted most in Blakeney's imagination—it would be too tame, too commonplace, minimising that very attractive spice of risk and danger which was so dear to his heart.

On the other hand should they act on their own initiative, the *Daydream* would be looked upon as a pirate. They could not claim the protection of their Government and technically could be fired upon by their own countrymen. But, as Blakeney pointed out, those naval men who did take out Letters of Marque did not seem to have obtained any very important results, nor were they any the better off, since to his certain knowledge, one such ship, if not more, had been abandoned to her

fate by the home Government. Percy argued that the difference was only one on paper, that in reality the French did not distinguish between a pirate and man-of-war: and as their enterprise would only be directed against French warships, they would have no need to fear a counter attack from their own countrymen.

Discussions between the three men lasted all night, and the early morning sun threw diagonal streaks of light across the carpet before a decision was arrived at. At length, Blakeney's point of view prevailed, and it was decided that the adventurers would act on their own initiative and rely upon their own cunning and powers to escape capture.

It was now too late to catch the tide that same morning, so they postponed sailing until the following evening. This allowed thirty-six clear hours for the provisioning of the corvette. In the meanwhile Sir Philip Glynde reviewed the men and put them through gun-drill, cutlass and pike practice, at which exercises the men seemed quite proficient, and Glynde was able to express himself as eminently satisfied with their capabilities.

4

At sunset, on July 5th, 1797, the *Daydream* glided gracefully out of the miniature harbour, curtsying to the wind, whilst a solitary figure from the shore waved a handkerchief in farewell.

Blakeney's objective, fully approved by his lieutenants, was, on this first adventure, to patrol the coast of France as far as Brest in the hope of espying a French frigate on the prowl or making for the English coast, to intercept her and to engage her with the determination to capture or scuttle her. But as their ideals were the same

as those that actuated the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel in the past, the *Daydream* would put out her boats and land the survivors somewhere on their native coast.

But man proposes, and God disposes!

For five hours the *Daydream* ran before the wind, but no sign of an enemy was sighted. Blakeney waxed impatient; he hated being thwarted though the other two tried to convince him that it was as difficult a matter to discover a French ship on the Narrow Seas as to rescue an aristo from a revolutionary prison. But night followed day and day, night, and still their thirst for adventure remained unappeased. They were now off the Cotentin and Blakeney presently decided to heave to off Cherbourg in the hope of catching a small Frenchman. However, as some of the elder sailors thought that dirty weather was brewing, they ran into one of the small well-hidden coves which are a feature of the coast to the westward of Cherbourg.

Fortunately there was ample water for secure anchorage and, as soon as the shades of evening began to draw in, Blakeney, not content to wait patiently on board, insisted upon making a landing in order to reconnoitre the coast. In spite of the protests of his companions and their arguments against the foolhardiness of such an undertaking, he ordered a boat to be hoisted out and had her oars muffled. He left instructions that he would use the old sea-mew call thrice repeated as a signal of his presence in the vicinity but that the *Daydream* was on no account to leave before daybreak. Should they not hear the call by then they were to sail, and keep out of sight until evening when they were to return and again await the signal. He then bade them all a cheery farewell, slipped over the side into the boat, took the oars and was soon swallowed up by the darkness.

Blakeney, so he subsequently told his friends, rowed to the shore, and left the boat under an overhanging cliff. Creeping cautiously over the rocks, he succeeded in reaching a path which wound upwards to the top of the cliffs. After a stiff climb he emerged on a small plateau whence he could command a view over the surrounding country. On his left, about a mile away, he



perceived a village and the tower of a church. Far away on his right a narrow stream meandered through the valley and was lost in the sea down below. At the mouth of the stream his eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, made out a cluster of cottages and a miniature port, in which a couple of vessels lay moored to a wharf. The cottages, the port and the vessels fascinated him, and he set out at a brisk pace for the valley, hoping, if noth-

ing more, to glean some information which might lead to an adventure.

From the top of the cliff the lights of the small harbour had appeared to be distant only a couple of kilometres or so down the coast to the South. But the distance in the uncertain light proved elusive. It turned out to be more like five kilometres than two, over sandy soil which was dry and gave under the foot, making progress both slow and wearisome. Eventually after about an hour, he reached a road which led directly to a hamlet. The little harbour was so well screened from view owing to the configuration of the shore than the *Daydream* must actually have sailed fairly close to it during the day without spotting it.

Now that he was within measurable distance of his objective Blakeney had not the vaguest idea as to what he intended to do or what he had hoped to find. The desire to land and to pry round had been irresistible and he had obeyed it trusting to chance to provide him with an opportunity for something exciting or adventurous. And the opportunity lay close at hand.

In spite of the dim light, he could now discern more clearly the two ships in the harbour, barely moving on the incoming swell. They proved to be French men-of-war. From the little hamlet close to the shore, came sounds of revelry, which seemed to issue principally from a low white-washed house, the doors and windows of which were brilliantly illuminated and peered through the darkness like so many bright eyes.

For a few minutes Blakeney stood silently surveying the scene. The darkness around him, the silence and above all his passion for adventure prompted him to draw nearer. Stealthily he reached the edge of the water. The tide was coming in with gentle murmurings, the

sky was overcast, the wharf tantalisingly near. In a moment Blakeney had stripped to the skin and after wading for a few yards, he plunged noiselessly into the sea. Swimming with powerful strokes, he reached the ship that lay moored to the wharf and, sighting a rope's end which hung over the nettings, he clambered aboard.

As he had suspected from the first the decks were deserted save for the sentry on the forecastle. Creeping on hands and knees, as soundlessly as a cat on the prowl, Blakeney approached the man and suddenly sprang on him, taking him wholly unawares, and together the two men rolled over and over on the deck. A blow between the eyes from Blakeney's powerful fist caused the man to lose consciousness.

Leaving him to lie there for the moment, Blakeney now made his way down the ladder to the lower deck. Here were two men, sitting at a table playing cards in the light of a feebly guttering candle. Their consternation when confronted by the apparition of a gigantic naked man who suddenly rose before them like an incarnation of the devil, must have been very great indeed for, according to Sir Percy's narrative, they uttered no cry, but merely gaped at him in fright and horror. Two punches straight on the jaw before they had recovered their scattered wits, sent the men rolling on the planks, senseless. A coil of rope lay close at hand. Rapidly and dexterously Blakeney gagged and bound the two Frenchmen together, and, heaving this inert bundle over his powerful shoulders, he carried them up the ladder and across the upper deck, and down to the wharf, and thence over to the beach.

Back he went to get the still unconscious sentry, and this man he also carried down to the beach to join his two pinioned mates. Satisfied that all three men were

powerless for the moment and would be so for a good many minutes yet, he went back to the ships. They were lying alongside one another: both completely deserted now; indeed Blakeney made sure of that, by clambering over to the other vessel and exploring her from end to end. In one of the cabins below he saw on a table a scrap of dirty paper and beside it an ink bottle and a pen. The temptation was irresistible. Though he knew that every minute, every second was precious, he took up the pen and on the scrap of paper he wrote: "Le rêve du jour est le cauchemar de la nuit."

With a grim chuckle of delight and holding the paper tightly in his hand he made his way back to the first ship, went aft to the powder magazine, laid a trail of powder, set it alight and clambered back to the wharf, by the way he had come.

With a few giant strides he was down on the beach. Here the two pinioned men were struggling desperately to free themselves from their bonds, while the third still lay unconscious. With another happy chuckle Blakeney thrust his scribbled message inside the shirt of one of the men; he then ran to rescue his cast-off clothes, and was in the act of picking them up when a loud explosion quickly followed by another, and another, proclaimed the destruction of the French frigates. At once the night became alive with shouts and people running from the village in the direction of the harbour.

Blakeney found the secluded corner under the cliffs where he had left the boat. Here he dressed himself, and from here the cry of the sea-mew thrice repeated echoed through the night. Within the next half-hour all traces of the *Daydream's* visit to the French coast had disappeared, save for the fact that a couple of French frigates lay on the bottom of the little harbour of Carteret.

5

The only report of the destruction of those ships which reached England came via the Government spies, who had heard the news in Paris some two weeks after the event. Rumour had it that the presence of the two French frigates at Carteret formed part of a plan for a raid on the Irish coast, there being ships of the same class hidden in other well-screened coves along that part of the French coast. The ships were to have set sail simultaneously, the troops that were to sail in them having been billeted in the villages close by. There seems to be no doubt that Blakeney's action did run athwart the French plans, for the Directoire Government appeared to have come to the conclusion that news had somehow or other leaked out and prudently decided to abandon them.

Blakeney himself confirms this point of view in his journal. He seems at one time to have paid a return visit to that particular portion of the French coast in the hopes of repeating his adventure, with other French vessels, but was bitterly disappointed to find that the birds had already flown.

"July 20th. We searched every possible nook, but not a trace of a ship did we find. I ventured on shore, in disguise, and mingled with some sailors drinking at an inn. I led the conversation round to the topic of the sunken ships and was told that those frigates formed part of a fleet, the object of which was to make a concentrated attack upon the English coast or else to carry troops to Ireland. It all depended upon circumstances and the weather."

It was also said that the epigram found inside the shirt of one of the unfortunate sailors had caused a sensation

among the staff officers and that the French Government had suppressed the news of the disaster. Rumours of a more or less sinister character flew from hamlet to hamlet and from village to village and created a feeling akin to panic. The crews of the frigates and their officers were all under arrest awaiting court martial. They were accused of dereliction of duty in that they had been careless of the safety of their ships. The men's defence was that they were attacked by a superhuman being of unnatural size, who hurled thunderbolts at them in the manner of Jupiter and rendered them senseless by the mere raising of his hand.

"The *Daydream* has indeed turned into a nightmare, methinks," Sir Percy further commented on the incident, "and it damn well serves the enemy right for raiding unfortified English townships. I hope that my feeble endeavours will teach them better manners. With good luck we might attempt further exploits, which would tend to aggravate the position and lead French sailors to emulate our fellows in engineering a general mutiny in their fleet. By this means we might obtain peace at last."

The full details of this adventure were brought to the notice of the English Government through an ex-petty officer in the navy, who had joined the secret service. This man, by the way, managed to convey the impression among his superiors that he himself had been the hero of the remarkable exploit.

England was agog with the news and the public demanded full details and the name or names of the gallant men who were the heroes of the wonderful adventure. In its eagerness it asked the King to honour these men in some signal way. But, officially, nothing appeared to be known and even the Admiralty feigned complete ig-

norance, so that people began to make enquiries on their own account. However, as reliable information was entirely lacking, it was generally agreed that the exploit must have been carried out by a pirate, whereupon speculation became rife as to whom must credit for the daring feat be ascribed. Oddly enough, the only guess which approached the truth came from an unexpected quarter. Many months later, when His Majesty was on board the *Royal Charlotte*, Sir Percy Blakeney, who was a guest in the Royal yacht, when in conversation with the King, showed such knowledge of seamanship that His Majesty was quite astounded and remarked casually:

"Sir Percy, I remember that you own a yacht yourself. The *Daydream* is she not called? I hope that you are not overcome by nightmares when on board?"

Blakeney gave his infectious laugh. "Begad, Sire, that's demmed amusing. Your Majesty was ever pleased to joke at my expense."

The subject was pursued no farther at the time, and Blakeney, much relieved, hoped that Royal interest in his affairs would end with this embarrassing conversation.

6

Blakeney and his two companions were delighted with the success of their first adventure and were eager to be off again in quest of more. But circumstances forced a delay. Their stock of provisions had run low. So they ran into Deal, and Blakeney was able to spend a few days with Marguerite at the "Nest."

On landing, however, a surprise awaited him for he found that his old friends of the League had guessed the connection between *Daydream* and *Nightmare*, and had come posting down to Dover, eager to be associated with

him once again in the pursuit of adventure. It appeared that most of them had read the reports of the sinking of the French frigates and had put two and two together. They had assembled and discussed the ownership of the *Nightmare* and had come to the conclusion that Blakeney was at the bottom of the business. Without knowing the full facts of the case, they raced down to Dover in the hopes that a new League was in formation under Blakeney's leadership and that he would enrol them once more under his banner, even if their duties should only be those of cabin boy or ship's cook.

Blakeney, however, was forced to disappoint them. He told them that there was no question of an organisation similar to that of the old League; that the *Daydream* could accommodate only enough men for their purpose; and that, though he knew them to be daring and fearless, he had this time only need of men who were familiar with the sea and with naval matters.

Ffoulkes tells us that they all pleaded with him, but in vain.

"We were bitterly disappointed that Percy would not allow any of us to accompany him in the *Daydream*, though most of us realised that his arguments against our pleading were justified. I suppose most of us, ever since the disbanding of the League, had nurtured hopes of further adventures under Percy's leadership and clung to the idea that one day he would devise another scheme as exciting, as soul stirring as were those happy days in France. However, it is not to be and we must remain content with the memories of those wonderful unforgettable adventures."

Having reprovisioned the *Daydream*, Blakeney and his band weighed anchor on September 3rd and sailed before the wind towards an unknown destiny.

For two days, according to the corvette's log, the wind was favourable. It blew them down the Channel and out into the Atlantic Ocean. On the fourth day out they hauled to the wind and made the French coast opposite Bordeaux.

There was no question this time of forcing a way into a port for the purpose of spying. The adventure was to fall principally to the credit of the sailors, as it was hoped to meet a French frigate on the open sea and to engage her. But, if the adventurers expected to sight any portion of the enemy fleet near Bordeaux, they were certainly disappointed, for there was no sign of a sail anywhere on the horizon. After hanging about for a couple of days, they hauled off and headed south towards the South of Spain, keeping well off the coast. It almost seemed as if the "Pimpernel" luck had deserted them, for many more days went by and not a single enemy vessel hove in sight: as their provisions were running dangerously low they were reluctantly forced to put about and returned to home waters without encountering anything more exciting than a shoal of dolphins.

After rounding Ushant, however, a sail was sighted to starboard heading up Channel. Both Glynde and Mackenzie pronounced her to be a French frigate. This sudden change in their luck cheered the spirits of all on board the *Daydream*, and their troubles were forgotten in the excitement of the chase. Every minute the *Daydream* gained on her enemy, and the next hour brought her within measurable distance of the French ship.

The frigate, preferring to fight nearer her own coast, went about and stood to the southward. The *Daydream*, having the heels of her enemy, closed rapidly and approached her from astern. As soon as the vessels were within range Glynde ordered all guns which would bear

to be fired at their greatest elevation in the hope of bringing a mast down, or at any rate, damaging the enemy's rigging. The frigate at first was able to rise her stern chaser, and, though a shot struck the deck of the *Daydream*, nobody was hit.

Soon the *Daydream* was too close for the stern chaser to be able to hit her full and her swaying mast made but a poor target for the frigate. Glynde now ordered every gun to be double shotted and every man to prepare to board. Yawing first to larboard and then to starboard, every gun in the ship was fired upward into the frigate's stern at a range of but twenty-five yards. The double shot coming up through the poop spread death among the afterguard and smashed the wheel, causing the ship to broach to and the mizzen topmast, which had been partly shot through earlier, fell on the quarter-deck.

Seizing the opportunity offered by the confusion thus engineered, the *Daydream's* crew sprang up the side, and in a few moments were masters of the poop. Training the stern chaser forward and loading it with langrage, of which there were several lying by the gun, Blakeney called on the crew to surrender. Flabbergasted by the daring of these *cochons d'Anglais*, the few surviving French officers tendered their swords and *Le Rousseau* was in the hands of Blakeney and his band.

The question now arose as to what they should do with their prize. Blakeney, who was the actual commander of the *Daydream*, proposed that the ship be scuttled and her officers and crew be landed at the nearest French port. But the crew, delirious with success, were reluctant to adopt this plan, and were all for towing the prize into Portsmouth and handing the crew over to the competent authorities.

"I expect that they wished to be received with a salvo

of hurrahs and a salute from the guns," as Blakeney wrote to Sir Alexander Topham a few days later, "as if we were celebrating the Prince's birthday. But I could not find it in my heart to blame the poor devils and it really was the deuce to forgo the fruits of victory or rather the thunders of victory!

"However, I was obliged to agree to this course in the end, but on two conditions. Firstly, I insisted that one of the French crew should be landed under cover of darkness at a French port so that he could convey the glad news to Paris, and that on reaching Portsmouth the strictest anonymity should be maintained. I have commanded Glynde to invent any plausible story so that my part in the affair shall remain a strict secret."

That evening, therefore, after an hour's sailing, the coast of France was neared, Blakeney ordered a boat to be hoisted out and a couple of seamen rowed one of the French sailors ashore. To this latter he gave a written message to be delivered to the Ministry of Marine in Paris. It read:

"Le Rousseau a rencontré Le Cauchemar."

After that Blakeney took no further part in the proceedings, leaving the command of the ship in the capable hands of Glynde.

That this act, which was really one of piracy, had no unpleasant consequences for the owner and crew of the *Daydream* may be gathered from the official records of the incident which merely state that "a privately owned yacht, having espied a French vessel in distress, went to her assistance and towed her into Portsmouth harbour where her entire crew were forthwith made prisoners of war. No mention of the *Daydream* or of Sir Percy Blakeney in those records, though it subsequently tran-

spired that the authorities were extremely suspicious, and it required the entire stock of Glynde's tact and diplomacy to keep Sir Percy's name out of the whole affair.

Soon after the little party's return to Dover, violent storms kept the *Daydream* locked in harbour, but for once Blakeney did not chafe against the vagaries of the weather which held him a prisoner in England, being well content to abide for a few weeks at Richmond, since another important event in the annals of the Blakeney family was daily expected.

7

But Blakeney was not content to be idle long, and soon he was aching to be off once more on adventure bound, his heart, as always, thirsting for excitement. Wherefore, he wrote to his two friends to join him again if they felt so inclined and he warned the crew of the *Daydream* to be ready for duty at a moment's notice. Within a few days, he had left London for the "Nest."

On October 14th he once more set sail in the *Daydream*. The weather was stormy; the *Daydream*, close-reefed and buffeted unmercifully by the gale, made little progress in the raging seas. In consequence, the adventurers were forced to keep away from the shore and were not able to make much headway towards the field of adventure, which they had hoped lay in wait for them out in the Channel.

After a few hours Glynde grew anxious and advised putting into harbour until the storm abated. This in fact they did, and Sir Percy, as soon as Portsmouth had been safely reached, posted in all haste back to Richmond in order to allay his wife's fears lest the bad weather had caused her anxiety.

Strangely enough, Marguerite had been extremely anxious for her husband's safety. Her intuition, rendered doubly sensitive by motherhood, had given her a strange presentiment of danger which would befall Percy on this voyage if he persisted in it. During the few days he stayed at her side she tried to persuade him to abandon the project. Almost he was turned from his purpose and would have given in to her insistence had not a special messenger arrived that evening from Glynde, informing him that weather conditions were now favourable and the *Daydream* ready to make a fresh start.

As before, they sailed south heading for the coast of France. Blakeney's plan, favoured by Glynde, was to fall on enemy ships as they left harbour for raiding expeditions. They espied various French ships upon the horizon, but they did not attempt to intercept these as their intention was to surprise the enemy near his own home waters, nor were they molested by them.

Thus they proceeded on their way until they reached the shores of Brittany where the coast line is serrated, and forms a hundred coves in which a ship could easily lie concealed secure from waters from the sea. In one of these the *Daydreams* cast anchor.

It was now an hour after sunset and darkness was rapidly gathering in. As soon as the night was sufficiently dark for his purpose, Blakeney ordered a boat to be hoisted out and started with muffled oars in order to spy out the vicinity. Hardly had he rowed a few strokes when suddenly a flare from the top of a nearby cliff illuminated the entire scene. Obviously the *Daydream* had been caught in a trap. The ship which they had sighted on their way out had been sent to watch their movements and carefully avoided combat while enticing the *Daydream* into the pitfall which they had laid for her.

And sure enough after the first flare which revealed her presence to other look-out posts, points of light began to gleam at intervals all along the coast-line, whilst random shots, fired from the top of the cliffs, fell about them with dull splashes into the water: some of them unpleasantly close to the little boat in which Blakeney sat.

"For a few seconds," Blakeney wrote to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, describing his adventure, "I thought that we were condemned to a watery grave. My first feeling was the indignity of being sent to drown in foreign waters, French waters to boot, without the chance of a nice little fight. Then it was that my wits came to my rescue. I rowed round to the port-side of the *Daydream* so that the dinghy was screened from view of our enemies on shore. I managed to scramble on board without being hit. After a brief consultation with Glynde and Mackenzie, we decided that there was only one thing to do, and that was to run for it. We weighed anchor. The wind was blowing off shore and we decided to beat off and on and thus lure the French ships out into the open. There were two frigates close by which we thought might pursue us, but hoped that we would prove the faster vessel."

The *Daydream* turned and fled to seaward. Under the circumstances, it was the only possible course to pursue. It was evident that the enemy's intention was to attack *Le Cauchemar*, and if possible, to capture her.

The *Daydream* kept on a steady course. Now and again a boom, followed by a dull splash astern, proclaimed that the French were in active pursuit. It was then about eleven o'clock at night. Some three hundred yards astern the two frigates could be discerned, their sails straining in a vain effort to lessen the distance between themselves and the *Daydream*. At Glynde's suggestion they now started to work to windward, making

long reaches. The heavier French ships could not follow these tactics so swiftly and at each tack they lost ground and presently their firing ceased.

An hour later, still pursuing the same tactics, the *Daydream* seemed well out of danger. At that moment three British ships were seen approaching from a northerly direction. They had evidently heard the firing. Also it was evident that they had espied the French ships for they were heading for the enemy.

The *Daydream* went about once more for Blakeney naturally wished to avoid meeting the British men-of-war! Within a few minutes the sound of a furious cannonade proclaimed that the English ships had met and engaged the French frigates. The *Daydream* was safe, and what was more important to her crew, forgotten. She made haste towards England, which was reached at three o'clock of the morning.

The end of this adventure dumbfounded Blakeney and his lieutenants. For them, it was an adventure spoiled and a humiliation. But the French apparently took a different view of their exploit. The *Moniteur* was furious at the news of this third disaster to isolated units of the fleet. Its leading article fulminated against the Ministry of the Marine and demanded a court martial for those who had so signally failed to bring the *Cauchemar* to book.

But what infuriated the French Government more than anything else was the tactics of the English, who apparently made use of a pirate to help them in contriving an ambush. In official circles it was thought that the *Cauchemar* had purposely led the French ships across the path of the British men-of-war.

"Begad, I was astounded when I heard this tit-bit of news," Blakeney wrote in the same letter to Sir Andrew

Ffoulkes. "If only the French had known the real truth! But I am vastly flattered that they should deem us so clever and I think that it will enhance our prestige. The *Daydream* is beginning to become a greater nightmare than I ever dared to hope.

"Do call on Marguerite whenever you get the chance. She would dearly love to see you and your wife at Richmond. Besides you must become acquainted with Violet Yvonne. I was delighted that you acted as godfather to the infant and am sure that she will live to thank you for the honour . . . !"

In England the reports were vague. The three men-of-war, the *Royal Princess*, *The Intrepid* and the *Devonport*, which had so opportunely appeared upon the scene, had captured both the French frigates. Apparently their commanders had not sighted the *Daydream*, because in their reports they made no mention of the yacht, but as they must have heard the firing, it may be supposed that only so much of their reports was published as was expedient at the time. Anyway, nothing was made public that could possibly connect the episode with a privately-owned yacht; and Blakeney was free from the tittle-tattle of gossip-mongers for which, no doubt, he was heartily thankful.

But, now that winter was fast approaching, Blakeney felt that the enterprise was becoming too foolhardy to be continued. He and his lieutenants had seen in this last adventure that the *Daydream*, in spite of her efficiency, could not withstand the mountainous seas which were to be expected during the winter months. She was also in need of a general overhaul and a few minor repairs, and for this purpose was taken to Southampton, Blakeney himself returning to London and to Marguerite.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAST ADVENTURE

I

WITH the approach of spring, the old longing for adventure returned with increased intensity. Marguerite had tried to keep Percy content at home, but it was no use; the spirit of adventure was already stirring in him. All of a sudden he would leave London for a few days and return with that far-away look in his eyes which told her as no words could, what was going on in his mind. The *Daydream*, after her overhaul, was back once more in the Dover roads, and during those excursions Blakeney would spend his days on board, dreaming, planning and longing to be up and doing once again.

Then one day, as he sat staring out across the Channel over towards the French coast, he felt a hand on his shoulder. Without looking up at the intruder, he knew that the call had come and that he was powerless to resist it. With a quaint sigh he rose and clasped the hand. The die was cast. Turning round he faced Glynde and Mackenzie. It appeared that they, too, were bored with life in London and were as eager as Blakeney himself to be up and doing. They had posted down to Dover with the hope that they would find him at the "Nest." They had sauntered down to the harbour to have a look at the sea, and thus the chance meeting came about. Within a few minutes the harbour was the scene of furious activity. The crew of the *Daydream* were summoned from

their homes and the preparations for an early departure were straightway begun.

Whilst Glynde supervised the embarkation and Mackenzie collected the necessary provisions, Blakeney wrote a hurried note to Marguerite.

"I beg to be excused, my dear. 'Tis, I know, the most shameful conduct and well-nigh unforgiveable. But what would you with a husband who can never stay still? How many times have I promised, I wonder, never to go off a-wandering again? This time it will be the last time I assure you. I feel somehow that these words are prophetic and that it is to be our last adventure. Good-bye."

Lady Blakeney's diary bears testimony to this expedition and her entry has the great merit of assigning a date to this adventure.

"April 4th, 1798. A courier has just brought Percy's letter from Dover. How I had hoped that these last few delightful months had eased that need for excitement and had subdued that restless heart. He swears that 'twill be the last time. How often have I heard those words before! How often have my fallen hopes been revived only to be dashed down once more into the cruel torture of suspense. And I must be brave, suffering the terrible anxiety without a word of protest. It is in my heart that Percy shall fail, so that he may return to me in all haste. But my prayers are never answered."

But, as events turned out, her words were prophetic.

The preparations were completed by the next day, the fifth of April. On the morning of the sixth, towards ten o'clock, orders to weigh anchor were given and the *Day-dream* set sail on a perfect sea. There was just enough off-shore breeze to carry her along at five knots and the sun shone brilliantly over them. It must have seemed

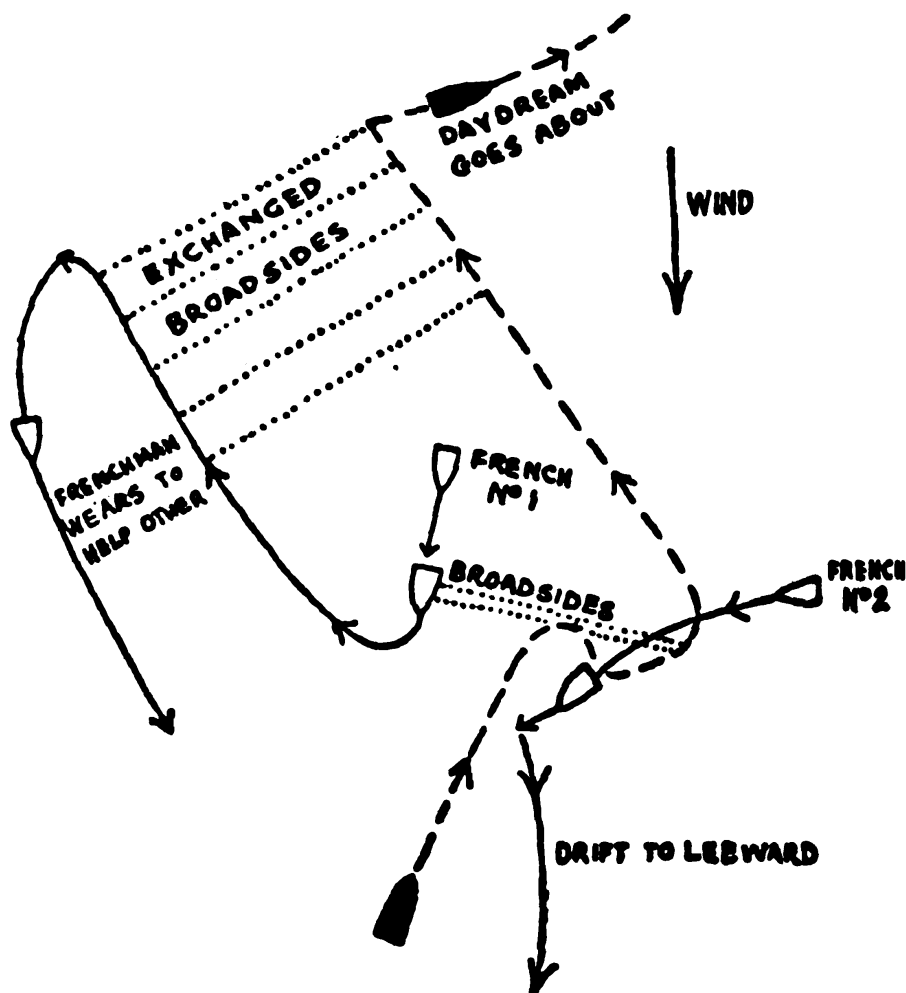
a propitious start to the adventurers. They crossed directly over the Straits. So peacefully did the seascape appear that it seemed hardly possible that bloody war should be ravaging the fair land and that they themselves, instead of on pleasure bent, were searching out means for adding to the horrible destruction. Lying just outside the harbour, fishing smacks leisurely floated on the waves whilst the men hauled the nets. No one appeared to pay the slightest attention to the intruders: for all the attention which the *Daydream* aroused, she might have been some friendly yacht out for a morning's cruise.

Glynde turned and, keeping a league's distance from the shore, slowly beat down the coast. After another five hours had passed by it was decided, since the sea seemed empty of the enemy, that it would be impossible to expect a meeting and that it would be more advantageous to steer for the open ocean and sail South in the hope of sighting either a French or Spanish frigate attempting to leave harbour.

Nothing untoward occurred for many hours. It was close on midnight when two strange shapes loomed out of the darkness. These turned out to be small French frigates. The sudden boom of a cannon followed by harsh snappy shouts from the captain caught those who were below unawares. When they reached the upper deck their eyes met the sight of a desperate situation indeed. The *Daydream* was being attacked from both sides. Her only advantage lay in her handiness and her speed.

Two French men-of-war were closing on each other and thus bearing down on the *Daydream* at an acute angle. Desperate situations require desperate remedies. The alternatives which faced the commander of the *Daydream* were unpleasant. To bear up and try to escape was

one of these but such an action was out of the question: not one of them on board would have permitted it. To



fight seemed equally hopeless, the odds being too heavily weighted against them.

Blakeney suggested that if they stood on, they would pass between the enemy ships which, being now but a little more than a cable's length from each other, would scarcely risk firing on the *Daydream* as she passed be-

tween them for fear of hitting their friends. This manoeuvre was carried out and, as soon as the *Daydream* was between the French ships, Glynde ordered the helm to be put up so as to pass close under the stern of the ship on his starboard hand. As he did so he fired a broadside aimed at her rudder which, owing to the *Daydream's* low free-board, was almost at the level of the guns. The Frenchman's rudder head was shot away and she broached to as Glynde hauled to the wind and put about. Some musketry from the Frenchman answered them and there were three casualties on board the *Daydream*. But the other French ship now seized the opportunity when the *Daydream* was clear of her sister, and opened with her larboard broadside, the English vessel replying as fast as her guns could be loaded. The rudderless frigate was now in irons and drifting to leeward out of the action. The other hauled to the wind thus bringing her starboard broadside to bear. Though the shooting was somewhat wild at the fairly long range, several shots struck the *Daydream* and some more casualties occurred. Unfortunately two shots hit the hull between wind and water, about a couple of feet from each other. These smashed the timbers and stove the side in for a distance of nearly four feet and the hull was badly shaken and sprung several other leaks. Fortunately, the Frenchman, unaware of this, had borne up and run down to the help of his comrade and the *Daydream*, by going about, was able to keep the hole in her side higher above water and make some attempt to repair the damage. It was soon realised, however, that this was waste of time for vigorous pumping failed to keep the water under. By partially stopping the worst of the leak, it was hoped to keep her afloat until the English coast was reached, but, neverthe-

less, whips were rigged and the undamaged boats got ready for hoisting out in case the end should come earlier.

The wind was slowly backing and, though this allowed the *Daydream* to close the English coast more rapidly, for Glynde dared not put her on the starboard tack, it was a threat of bad weather, and, if they had to take to the boats, this might make their situation precarious.

The enemy ships being now far to leeward, there was no further danger of being attacked, and another pump which had been damaged in the action was repaired and manned by the gun's crews. It seemed that it might be possible to keep the water under, but the men were tiring, for work at the pumps is heavy. Sir Percy, with his customary optimism, suggested that they should heave to and, after making such repairs as were possible, should run down towards the enemy and try to inflict further damage on them.

Both Glynde and Mackenzie vehemently asserted that it would be rank madness to attempt any further fighting now that such a respite had been granted to them, and they both insisted that an endeavour should be made to reach safety. A rapid calculation showed them that they were making good progress towards the English coast, and that there was a distinct hope, ere the *Daydream* sank, of getting within reasonable distance of shore.

After three hours, an uneasy swell, forerunner of a storm, began to work up from the westward, causing the ship to roll. The labouring opened the seams of the weakened hull and the end of the *Daydream* was in sight. Water had reached the gun-deck, she was practically water-logged and no further progress could be made. Reluctantly the boats were hoisted out and she was left

to her watery grave. A few minutes later, in a swirl, the *Daydream* disappeared below the surface of the sea.

2

The first rays of dawn lit up an expanse of leaden sea. Stepping their masts and making sail, side by side, the four boats of the *Daydream* forged steadily ahead. They were alone; no sail was in sight: no faint haze proclaimed the vicinity of land. In each boat there were enough provisions to last them twelve hours or so. The only real danger which faced the men was that of a sudden storm of heavy sea.

The best description of the experiences of the adventurers is to be found in a letter written by Blakeney to his friend, Lord St. Denys, some few weeks after the events.

"After a few hours' sailing," he writes, "the tempest which we feared was gathering in the west and it was approaching us rapidly. The sky ahead of us darkened, great clouds began to gather and the wind came in gusts. A few heavy drops of rain splashed down and as quickly ceased. The storm seemed to withdraw as if to husband its strength for a more furious outburst. An unearthly hush brooded over sky and sea which both took on a leaden hue. We close-reefed our sail and soon the wind burst on us in fury, driving spume into the air. This and the murkiness due to the heavy clouds made it difficult for the boats to keep together, for we could seldom see each other at a cable's length.

"The boats were now fast being separated from each other and I lost sight of Mackenzie's; Glynde was about twenty yards in front of me. Perhaps it was lucky for me that I am not a sailor born as I remained impervious to

the general tension, until heavy rumbles in the distance and sudden flashes of lightning proclaimed that the storm was growing in violence and approaching us rapidly. At the same time the sea started to stir and troubled waves got up first with a slow roll, as of unaccustomed passengers upon a ship's deck—then faster rolling billows as the wind increased its strength. These beat against the boat, throwing white spume over the men and drenching us all in sprays of ice-cold water. The wind tugged at our clothing, flinging our laces and shirts into our faces so that we were nearly blinded.

"The sky darkened still more. The sea heaved, responding to the wrath of the storm, demanding vengeance upon us humans who thus dared to defy the elements.

"Any steady progress was now well-nigh impossible. The men were impotent to keep the helm and to bail out the water at the same time, water which struck our frail barks and almost swamped them. Within a few minutes we were drifting helplessly at the mercy of the wind and waves. My boat was by now half-filled with water and in the intervals of keeping the level down by bailing the boat, we tried to keep ourselves cheerful by telling silly stories!

"By now I had lost sight of the other boats. It seemed as if we were entirely alone on this surging sea and I was sure that my last moment had come. . . !"

When the end seemed inevitable and all hope of being rescued was given up, their luck held. Through the murk of the storm a ship hove into sight, bearing down upon them through the deep troughs of the wind-tossed waves. A British frigate, which had been driven off her course earlier in the day, had seen the plight of those helpless sailors and had made all haste to their rescue.

Most of the men were too weak and exhausted to realise that their lives had been saved. Even Blakeney's magnificent physique had crumpled up under the terrific strain. It also happened that their rescue was marred by the loss of the boat in which was Mackenzie. Though search was made for her for many hours, they were never found and it is supposed that she must have been swamped earlier on in the day.

As soon as Blakeney was sufficiently recovered from the ordeal to answer questions, he was greeted by none other than Nelson himself. The Admiral, as soon as he knew the identity of the man he had saved, refused to remain content with the lame story of a pleasure cruise and an accident, since he had intercepted a battered French frigate towing a rudderless ship. The firing had been reported to him and the exploits of the *Cauchemar* were common knowledge.

It appears evident that Nelson entertained no doubts as to the identity of his guest, for he is reported to have told a friend that he had rescued the Scarlet Pimpernel from a watery grave, but, on being asked for further details, refused to reveal any names. Sir Percy was grateful for the preservation of his secret and he had the honour of presenting the great little Admiral with a beautiful tie-pin, composed of rubies and diamonds in the shape of the famous device.

3

It had indeed been the final adventure. The after consequences of it kept Blakeney helpless for many a weary week, owing to an attack of pneumonia caused by long immersion in the water coupled with exposure for hours to cold, biting winds.

He was now brought face to face with the realities of life; he realised how near he had been to depriving his son of a father: he found that time had flown on swift wings and that he was not so young as he was. He was forced reluctantly to give up his many activities and concentrate on more sedate pleasures. And he turned his mind to family affairs which had become terribly involved during his many absences. The bailiff was not satisfactory; the stables had been neglected and his personal affairs had got into a hopeless mess. Therefore, with all that work on his hands, he had no time to think: the regrets which he felt were allayed by the activities of family life and he found his pleasures in his home and the company of his wife and children.

The quietude of this new life after the tempestuous days of the past filled his heart with that sense of peace and contentment, which is so often the privilege of intrepid souls and which no amount of glory or excitement can give. The love of adventure and daily risks which had possessed him to the exclusion of all other emotions had gradually yielded to a richer and deeper love. The passionate interludes of a few years back, so intense and yet so brief, merged in the riper, fuller affection of later years. He still laughed uproariously; he still dressed in the height of fashion. Richmond in the summer and Bath in the winter found the Blakeney's always leading the fashion, gracing society balls with their presence.

And so the years passed and with their passing so did the memory of former delights slowly fade away. His outlook on life he left to posterity in a long letter which he wrote to his erstwhile companion and lifelong friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, on the occasion of the birth of the latter's son:

"DEAR ANDREW,

"My heartiest congratulations to Suzanne and yourself on the arrival of the hoped-for heir. I am truly delighted at the news. He will be George's fag at Harrow. I wonder whether they will prove such a pair of lazy rascals as we were. Heigh-ho! How long ago that time seems now. Egad, at all events, we can truthfully say that we have lived. What price the old 'Chat-Gris' again, you dog, and those marvellous rides through the dark country roads of France with women and children clinging to us for dear life. Well, remember to visit the Cabaret de la Liberté and citizen Rateau when your regiment captures Paris.

"Looking back, I often wonder myself whether the Scarlet Pimpernel was not a myth, dreamt about after the third bottle of port. Nay, my dear Andrew, I am not a sentimentalist, but, all the same, as I ride round Richmond with young George, those days do verily seem but a romantic illusion: the scar, that magic 'M' on my forearm, is the only concrete reminder that, once upon a time, we did really and truly indulge in that kingliest of all sports.

"Should another chance come, you ask, would I repeat? 'Tis an unanswerable question, my friend. I hardly know and I should hate to commit myself. There are others now to consider. Would you leave your Suzanne and young Anthony (that is his future name, is it not?) in order to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of anonymous adventure? I doubt it. Yet the heart would urge and the spirit tug. Methinks that the flesh would be too demmed weak!

"Frankly I cannot deny the lure of the old life. This all seems paradoxical and contradictory it is true, but I

thrill now to the joy of seeing young George develop. I love to teach him the tricks of boxing and fencing; I enjoy training his muscles and inculcating in him the ideals of an English gentleman.

"Begad, it's demmed amusing when I really think about it and realise the vast abyss which now separates the Scarlet Pimpernel of yore from the Sir Percy Blake-ney of to-day.

"Do you ever have twinges of regret?

"Tony has become uxorious in the extreme. Nevertheless, both you and he owe somewhat of a debt to those charming people who nearly cut off the heads of your adorable wives! As for me, I must own to an eternal debt of gratitude which I owe to our one-time engaging friend, Monsieur Chambertin, who must, even now, be writhing in a very hot furnace down below!

"Well, dear old comrade, I have talked enough nonsense for one letter. All that remains to us in the future is in the hands of our two bits of flesh whom we call our sons.

"London seems pretty much the same, though the war fever is still at its height. H.R.H. is very furious that he cannot command a regiment and was only yesterday evening cursing the luck which allowed you to be away on campaign whilst he was forced to stick at home. We form the same merry old whirligig as of yore, though I deem we are more sedate and one hates the grey hairs which appear on one's head!

"And on that remark which will doubtless shock you more than any other in this long rigmarole, I will bid you farewell."

APPENDIX I

MEMBERS OF THE LEAGUE OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

THIS list has been drawn up as accurately as existing documents permit.

A. The original League or Founder Members who formed the party on August 2nd, 1792, nine in number:

- 1. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes (second in command).**
- 2. Lord Anthony Dewhurst.**
- 3. Lord Edward Hastings.**
- 4. Lord John Bathurst.**
- 5. Lord Stowmarries.**
- 6. Sir Edward Mackenzie.**
- 7. Sir Philip Glynde.**
- 8. Lord Saint Denys.**
- 9. Sir Richard Galveston.**

B. Members enrolled in January, 1793, ten in number.

- 10. Sir Jeremiah Wallescourt.**
- 11. Lord Kulmstead (the only traitor to the band).**
- 12. George Fanshaw.**
- 13. Anthony Holte.**
- 14. John Hastings (Lord Edward's cousin).**
- 15. Lord Everingham.**
- 16. Sir George Vigor, Bart.**
- 17. The Hon. St. John Devinne.**
- 18. Michael Barstow of York.**
- 19. Armand St. Just (Marguerite's brother).**

APPENDIX II

A LIST of the noblemen, women, children and prisoners of the revolution, as far as has been verified, who owed their lives to the Scarlet Pimpernel, with approximate dates.

Comte de Bonnefin.	The first rescue carried out by Sir
An unknown girl	Percy Blakeney and one which led to the formation of the League.
	July 28th, 1792.
The Comte de Tournay, his wife and daughter.	
Armand St. Just and three others.	August 4th, 1792.
Esther Vincent and Jack Kennard.	September 3rd.
Lucille Calmette.	
Valentin Lemurrier.	
Comte de Sucy.	October 10th.
Comte de Tournon d'Agenay and wife.	
Dr. Désèze, wife and daughter.	
Duc de Montreux and family of eight.	
St. Luc and family.	November 5th.
Bishop of Clarenceaux and eight priests.	January 20th, 1793.
Agnes de Lucinnes.	
Celeste and Ferdinand Malzieu.	February 28th.
Lénègre and family.	
Vicomte de Mortain and family (Lyons).	
Paul Déroulède, Juliette Marny, Anne Mie and twenty others.	
Abbé Mesnil.	
Chevalier d'Egremont.	

Cherneuil, Delleville, Galipaux, sixty
women, twelve priests and about
forty children.

April 12th, 1793.

Madame Lannoy and her child.

July 8th.

Curé de Venelles.

Madame Lenoir Mailly, her sister and
two children.

De Montignac.

The Dauphin of France.

1794-

Fleurette Chauvelin.

January 16th.

Comte de Cluny.

De Frontenac and family.

Yvonne de Kernogan.

Jeanne Toutgin, George Racheter, de
Menetray and families.

Lady Blakeney.

July 27th.

It is estimated that Sir Percy and his League rescued close on a thousand men, women and children in all: unfortunately, however, all are not recorded. Many narratives of *émigrés* to England whose escape from revolutionary France have been attributed to the Scarlet Pimpernel, were found to be conjectures or later additions, and therefore untrustworthy.

APPENDIX III

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